

# MIKE SHAYNE

## MYSTERY MAGAZINE

MAY 1980

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by Brett Halliday

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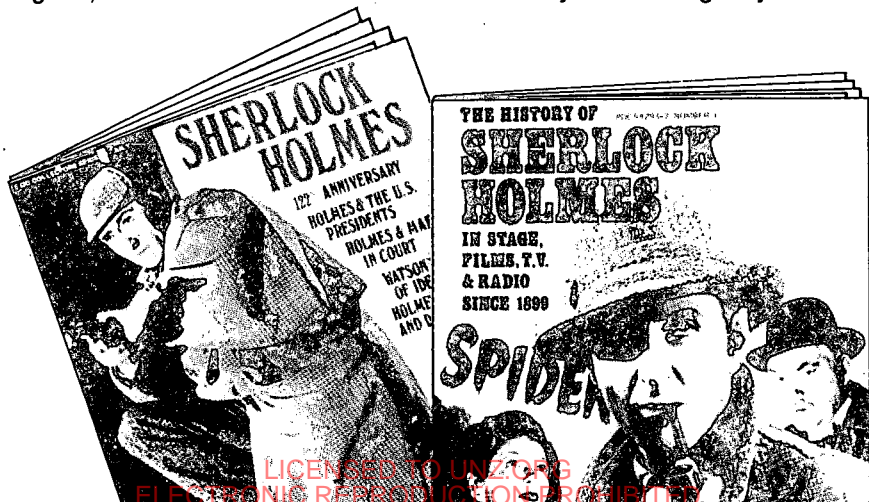
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# MIKE SHAYNE

## MYSTERY MAGAZINE

### THE BEDLAM FILE

by Brett Halliday

*Three dangerous patients escaped from a private mental hospital, fatally wounding a guard and leaving a note pinned to his chest. The message was simple and to the point: Mike Shayne is next!*..... 5

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# MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAKERS

The following are excerpts from letters received from writers who sent us autobiographical material. Any resemblance to real persons is probably more than coincidental.

*ROBERT HOSKINS was born in the tranquil albeit wintery-bitter cold western foothills of the Adirondacks. Author of more than 50 novels, including suspense, science fiction and juveniles, he has appeared in most of the mystery magazines. He has edited some 20 science fiction anthologies. At present he reluctantly and wheezingly makes his home in the smog of the San Fernando Valley.*

*PAUL GLEESON is a 38-year-old Chicago lawyer and writer. Years ago in the Orient, he learned the strange and hypnotic power to cloud his own mind (by drinking Vietnamese beer) so that he could not see other men. He never uses this power for personal gain, but solely in the fight against crime. His hobbies include reading stories about famous people's nervous breakdowns, and whistling tunelessly in crowded elevators.*

*Any autobiographical information about me, modest JOHN PETERSON tell us, is hardly fascinating, but it is brief. I was born in Boston, Massachusetts and lived there until I joined the Marine Corps in 1951. After traveling around the world for some years, I settled here in the Northwest, and for the past ten years have worked for a freight-forwarding firm in Seattle. I'm an avid outdoorsman and hope to incorporate some of my fishing and hunting knowledge in future stories.*

*STEVEN MERTZ was born in 1947, and has lived and traveled widely in America, Europe and Canada. Before turning to full time writing several years ago, he worked in a wide variety of occupations, including disc jockey, record shop owner, resort*

*Continued to page 112*

# THE BEDLAM FILE

by  
Brett  
Halliday





THE WARD WAS NEVER totally quiet.

Even though the lights were turned out every night at nine o'clock, and even though the patients were all required to take the little pills that would make them sleep, complete silence never quite descended on the long room. There were patients who didn't sleep well, despite the medicine. They would toss and turn in the narrow bunks, muttering in their half-dreams, feebly protesting against whatever private demons pursued them. This wasn't the Violent Ward, where the patients were strapped

into their bunks, and sometimes one of the men would protest against the demons a little too strenuously. When that happened, the patient would usually roll a few inches too far and drop off the bunk, to land with an unexpected thud on the cold tile floor. And usually a scream would rip out of his throat at his rude awakening. That roused the whole ward, of course, and then Ben Parker would have to summon some of the male nurses to help him settle things down again.

A pudgy, middle-aged man, Ben leaned against the counter in the nurses' station and looked out



through the glass at the sleeping men. There was a beer bottle in his hand, and he would raise it to his lips occasionally to take a sip. He never drank enough to make him muddled. Just enough to help him make it through these long nights.

The only light in the nurses' station came from the dial of the clock on the wall behind Ben. The hands said that it was half past three in the morning. three more hours until the nurses started arriving and Ben could go home. He was beginning to wish he had never taken this job at the Brenham Sanitarium. At first, he had thought that it wouldn't be much different from all the other night watchman jobs he had held. But it had been different. A warehouse of an office building was something you guarded, something to protect against thieves and vandals. But thieves and vandals of a different sort had already done their work on his present charges, leaving them with damaged minds.

At least Dr. Brenham was trying to help, Ben reflected. This was the charity ward, although no one called it that out loud. The Sanitarium was a private hospital. It didn't have to take disadvantaged cases whose only other hope would have been the overcrowded state institutions. Ben shuddered when he thought about some of the horror stories he had heard about those places.

He had no way of knowing if they were true or not, but he hoped they weren't.

No, Dr. Brenham could have only concerned himself with the rich patients, the ones in the other wing who paid exorbitant prices to have their psyches probed. Ben often mused, *What the hell, it's their money. Let them waste it any way they please.*

By now, Ben knew the patients in this ward and could have gone down the double row of bunks, pointing at the shadowy bulk in each one and telling its name and neurosis. He liked these men, most of them anyway. They hardly ever gave him any trouble, except when something happened to disrupt the routine and confuse them.

Ben drained the bottle and set it down on the counter. He turned away from the protective glass that sealed him off from the patients and went out through the door in the rear of the nurses' station. The drug room was behind that door, and then a little rest-room behind that.

As soon as Ben was out of sight, there was a sudden scuffling noise in the ward. It was so low that it was almost inaudible under the snores and mumbles of the sleeping men. It wasn't likely that Ben would have heard it, even if he had been in the nurses' station.

Another door in the side wall of the station led out into the ward

itself, but it was always kept locked at night. The lock was an old one, though, and no thought had been given to changing it periodically because the men in this ward had never been considered troublemakers.

The doorknob began to jiggle slightly, and there was a slight scratching noise.

Ben came back into the nurses' station a few moments later. He felt weary, his advancing age getting to be more and more of a burden. *Nope, not near as young as I used to be*, he thought.

Suddenly, a sense of unease, a feeling of something being wrong, stole over him. He couldn't have said what caused it, but his eyes narrowed and he squinted out through the glass at the darkened ward. Everything seemed to be calm. There was a dark form in every bunk, some of them moving slightly, as usual.

Ben shook his head. He told himself he was getting spooky. It wasn't like he was afraid of the patients. Most of them were completely harmless. But there was just something about spending your nights watching over a bunch of loonies...

Dr. Brenham didn't like that word. He wouldn't stand for his employees using it. Ben didn't see why he felt that way. After all, there had to be *something* wrong with them or they wouldn't be there, now would they?

He nodded, satisfied that his

nervousness was just a natural reaction to his surroundings. Maybe another beer would settle him down.

That's when he heard the chuckle behind him.

He spun, gasping in fear and surprise. A dark figure loomed behind him, between him and either door. Ben could tell that the figure was wearing the white outfit that all the patients wore.

"You're not supposed to be in here," Ben said quickly. It was important to show the patients that he wasn't afraid of them.

The man just chuckled again and moved a step closer.

Ben moved back until he bumped against the counter. His heart was pounding, sending a drumbeat of fear through his veins. He wished for the first time that he had been allowed to carry a gun, like he had done on other jobs. But he had no weapon, nothing with which to fight off an attack.

There was a button on the counter, a button that turned the intercom on. He would have to punch it, yell for help, get those damn male nurses in here in a hurry...

The patient's hand shot out and clamped down on Ben's wrist, stopping it a good six inches away from the call button. He laughed.

"What... what do you want?" Ben stammered. "I'll give you whatever you want."

A harsh whisper came back at



him. "You don't have what I want, old man."

Ben knew the voice, knew why there was such strength in the man's grip. He said, "Don't do this, Drago. You're going to get in a lot of trouble . . . !"

"Shut up. I'm tired of being threatened."

Ben saw movement in the shadows, saw Drago's other hand coming up toward his face, the fingers long and splayed and powerful. Ben gasped, "No!"

And then the fingers were around his throat. He thrashed feebly, but the grip on his throat and his wrist held him nearly immobile. The pounding of his heart was getting louder and louder.

He tried to turn, to reach out with his other hand for the call button. The desperately-seeking fingers fell short, and then he felt himself being turned and forced down. He kicked out with his feet, but they scraped futilely on the floor.

The dark figure bulked above him, shutting out the light from the clock. Ben threw a punch that connected with Drago's face, but there wasn't enough force behind it to do any good. Drago just chuckled again. He seemed to be enjoying himself immensely.

Almost two minutes went by before Drago stood up again. Ben Parker stayed motionless on the floor. Drago went to the door and slipped back out into the

ward. He gestured, and two more forms emerged from the shadows to join him. In a whisper, he said, "It's okay. I got them." He held up a heavy ring of keys that until seconds before had been clipped to Parker's belt.

"They'll get us out of here?" one of the other two asked.

"That's right," Drago nodded. "And then the whole world is ours for the taking. There's just one thing I've got to do first."

Drago ducked back into the nurses' station, found a pad and pencil lying on the counter, and scribbled a note hurriedly. When he was done, he placed the piece of paper carefully on Ben Parker's still chest.

The three patients slipped out of the ward then, using the stolen keys to unlock the main door. They moved carefully through the rest of the hospital, none of them saying anything. Drago directed them with curt motions of one big hand. He seemed to know just which corridors would be deserted, and he led them directly to an office whose door opened to one of the keys. They paused just long enough for Drago to rifle through the desk and two file cabinets, and then he unlocked the window. There was no fence around this section of the hospital, just a narrow strip of green lawn. The three men sprinted across it and then disappeared into the pre-dawn darkness.

The ward from which they had

escaped was quiet until almost six-thirty, when Head Nurse Emily Fletcher arrived. She knew something was wrong as soon as she saw that the door into the ward was ajar. She frowned. That was inexcusable. Why, any of the patients could have just wandered out into the rest of the Sanitarium. She would have some sharp words for the night watchman, Parker.

But the door to the nurses' station was open, too, and Nurse Fletcher began to suspect that this was no mere case of carelessness. Nothing seemed to be wrong in the ward; the men were still sleeping, but she broke into a trot anyway.

A scream almost made its way out of her throat when she thrust the door back and saw the body on the floor. She forced it down, though, and stood there for a moment, breathing deeply, trying to control herself. She didn't want to upset the patients.

Moving with trained efficiency, she crouched beside Parker and felt for a pulse that wasn't there. She conceded as much after a few seconds, then stood up and pressed the call button to summon help.

That done, she stooped and picked up the piece of paper that had been on Parker's chest. She hadn't noticed it at first in her shock and horror, but now she scanned the words that were printed on it in block letters. She didn't know what they meant

for sure, so she put the note on the counter. Someone else could figure it out later. She turned to look out through the glass at her sleeping charges, and she thought, not for the first time, *Why does something always have to happen to disrupt everything?*

She turned as she heard running feet coming closer, the sound of the male nurses responding to her call. Her hand brushed against the note, knocking it to the floor, where she stepped on it with one of her sensible white shoes.

The note read simply — MIKE SHAYNE IS NEXT.

## II

IF MIKE SHAYNE HAD BEEN the type to whistle when he was happy, he would have been whistling when he came into his East Flagler Street office. The sky above Miami was bright and clear, there was just enough cool breeze off the ocean to make things comfortable, and the bank balance was robust and healthy.

He should have known something was wrong.

The big redheaded detective scaled his hat onto the rack as he came through the door. His rugged face creased into a grin as he saw Lucy Hamilton busily typing up a report. Lucy was pert, brown-haired, attractive, and much more than a secretary to Shayne. He couldn't get along

without her, in more ways than one. He said cheerily, "Good morning, Angel. How are you?"

The smile she gave back at him was forced, and he had the first intimation that all was not as it should be. She said, "I'm fine, Michael. Tim and Will Gentry have both been trying to get hold of you."

Shayne propped a hip on the corner of Lucy's desk. "Did they say what it was about?"

Lucy shook her head. "No, but they both sounded like it was something important."

"They leave numbers where I could reach them?"

"No. Tim said he'd just keep trying here and at your apartment until he caught you."

Shayne nodded. "I guess I'll wait for his call, then. Anything else pressing?"

"Not right now. There's some correspondence, but it can wait until we see what's up."

Shayne went on into the inner office and stood for a moment at the window, reflecting on what Lucy had told him. She knew as well as he did that something important might be in the wind. Timothy Rourke, top reporter for the *Miami Daily News*, and Will Gentry, chief of Miami's police, wouldn't be urgently calling Shayne just to pass the time of day, even if they were old friends of the redhead.

Shayne had just fired up a cigarette when the telephone

rang. He heard Lucy answer it, and then a moment later, she called through the open inter-office door, "It's Tim again, Michael."

He said, "Thanks, Angel," and scooped up the receiver of the telephone on his desk. He barked into it, "Shayne here. What's up, Tim?"

The voice of the lanky newsman came back at him. "Have you ever heard of the Brenham Sanitarium, Mike?"

Shayne settled down in his chair and replied, "I don't think so. Should I have?"

"It looks like it. That's where I am now, Mike. It's a private mental hospital, catering mostly to rich patients, but they do have a ward for charity cases which is partly supported by the county. Three of those patients escaped sometime during the night last night."

Shayne sent a cloud of smoke toward the ceiling and said, "What's that got to do with me?"

"They killed a night watchman on their way out, and they left a note saying that you're next."

Shayne sat up straight, his craggy brow furrowing into a frown. "You're sure about that?" he asked.

"Positive. Gentry's here, and he let me sneak a gander at the note."

Butting the cigarette out in his ashtray, Shayne asked, "How do I get to this place?"

Rourke gave him directions rapidly. Shayne said, "I'll be there as quick as I can," and cradled the phone.

Lucy was looking questions at him as he strode into the outer office and snagged his hat off the rack. "Business?" she asked.

"Murder."

"That's what I said."

Shayne smiled grimly at her words, even though his good mood of minutes earlier had vanished. He said, "If Gentry calls again, tell him that I've already heard about it from Tim and that I'm on my way."

"On your way where?"

"The Brenham Sanitarium."

Shayne paused. Lucy had a right to know. "Three mental patients escaped and killed one of the staff there. According to a note they left, I'm next on their hit list. On second thought, why don't you lock up the office and go home? I don't want them showing up here while you're alone."

Lucy gestured at the paperwork on her desk. "What about all this typing?"

Shayne gathered up the pile of papers, plopped them into Lucy's arms, and said, "Take it with you. I mean it, Angel, I'll worry about you if you're here by yourself."

"Oh, all right," Lucy said grudgingly, but Shayne could tell by the tight set of her facial muscles that she didn't really mind. With three potential

psychopaths gunning for her boss, she would have to be a fool not to worry, and Lucy Hamilton was no fool.

Shayne gave her a goodbye kiss that was quick but heartfelt and then hurried down to the basement garage where he parked his Buick.

**THE BRENHAM SANITARIUM** was in a mostly residential district across town from Shayne's office, but the mid-morning traffic was light and he arrived less than half-an-hour later. As he pulled up, he could see that a high hedge ran most of the way around the property. A driveway turned in between stone pillars, but there was no gate to close off the entrance. Shayne frowned briefly. That seemed unusual for a mental hospital.

There was a cop in uniform standing at the entrance. Shayne pulled up beside him and rolled down the window. Before he could say anything, the cop said, "Oh, it's you, Mr. Shayne. Chief Gentry's been trying to locate you. I guess you heard what happened?"

"Right," Shayne nodded. "Where can I find Gentry?"

"I don't know, Mr. Shayne, but just go right on in. I'm sure you'll find him easy enough. Just listen for the roar."

Shayne grinned. "Should I tell him you said that?"

"No, sir, I'd like to keep living."

Shayne waved a hand in farewell and drove on into the grounds. He studied the layout as he piloted the Buick up the drive.

The hospital seemed to be shaped like a U, with two wings and a central section connecting them at one end. All three sections seemed to be about the same size, and all of them had two stories. Ivy climbed up the red brick walls in places, and the surrounding lawns were green and well-kept. Shayne noticed that one of the wings, the one on the left, did have a fence running around it, eight feet of chain link with two strands of barbed wire on top.

There were double glass doors in the middle of the central section. Shayne parked behind a police cruiser and hurried through the doors into a carpeted lobby. There was a counter on one side of the room, with several desks and clerks behind it. Doors on both sides of the lobby opened out into a central hall. The entrance on the left was guarded by two uniformed officers.

Shayne approached them and said, "I'm looking for Chief Gentry. I'm Mike Shayne."

One of the cops nodded. "Yes, sir. The Chief wants to see you, too. Just go down this hall and then turn right at the end of it."

"Thanks," Shayne grunted. "All right to smoke in here?"

They shrugged, so Shayne fired

up a cigarette as he strode down the hall. He could tell by glancing in partially open doors that this was the administrative section of the hospital.

The corridor took a right-angle turn at the end of the hall, but the way was barred by a folding metal gate that extended from floor to ceiling. Another cop was on the other side of the gate. Shayne identified himself again, and the cop let him through.

Shayne could hear a babble of voices now, coming from down the hall. There were closed doors on either side, and Shayne wondered briefly if there were wards behind them. The sound of voices increased as he hurried along, passing through two more of the metal gates before he came to one of the heavy doors that was open.

He paused just outside of it to get the layout. Chief Will Gentry's broad, beefy figure was surrounded by reporters, among them the scarecrow-like Tim Rourke. Behind Gentry were two people in white coats, one of them a sallow-faced man with a neat dark beard, the other a very attractive woman in her thirties with ash blonde hair.

"All right, all right," Gentry was saying. "I told you, you know just about as much as I do, and when I find out anymore, I'll tell you. Now clear out and let us do some work."

The reporters turned grudgingly

to go and spotted Shayne lounging in the doorway. They flocked toward him immediately, and he put a mock expression of alarm on his face.

"Sorry fellas," he said, holding up his hands, "I don't even know as much as you do."

They clustered around him, anyway, bursting with questions, and it took most of Shayne's brawn to push his way through to Gentry.

The chief started roaring then, and the reporters, with the keen knowledge of human nature common to their breed, grabbed their notebooks and minicams and cleared out.

"You too, Rourke," Gentry snapped.

Rourke's face creased in a sardonic grin. "Come on, Will, you wouldn't boot me out, would you?"

"I would before I'd have that pack of wolves swarming around me again. Sorry, Tim."

Shayne nodded. "It's all right, Tim. I'll fill you in on everything as soon as I'm through here."

Rourke lifted a hand in a gesture of farewell and went out. Gentry motioned to a uniformed officer, who shut the thick door.

Gentry shifted the stub of an unlit cigar from one corner of his mouth to the other and grunted, "This is bad business, Mike."

"What happened?"

"Three of the patients in this ward took off last night. They

strangled the guard who was on duty and left this."

Gentry held out the note that had been left on Ben Parker's chest. Shayne took it, scanned the words, and handed it back. Almost unconsciously, the redhead's blunt fingers came up to tug at his left earlobe. "You know who the three are?" he asked.

"We've got their names. Frank Drago, Harry Eversole, and Jimmy Garvin. Any of them mean anything to you?"

"Drago is a familiar name. The other two don't ring any bells."

Gentry nodded grimly. "Drago should sound familiar. You helped us send his brother Jack to prison."

Shayne frowned. He remembered now. Jack Drago had been part of a drug smuggling ring that the Miami police had broken up with Shayne's assistance over a year earlier. He said, "You think that's the reason for the threat they left?"

"Yeah, that and the fact that Jack Drago was killed in a fight in the exercise yard three weeks ago."

The bearded man stepped forward now. "We think that the news of his brother's death was what pushed Frank over the edge, Mr. Shayne. He had shown paranoid tendencies before, but he had never been considered extremely violent."

"This is Dr. Eric Brenham,"



Gentry introduced. "He's the owner and chief of staff here, Mike."

Shayne shook hands with the doctor, who said, "And this is Dr. Jessica Chambers, Mr. Shayne. Dr. Chambers is my chief resident and is in charge of this ward."

Shayne nodded to the blonde woman and smiled as he shook hands with her also. He asked, "What about the other two men?"

"We believe that Drago planned their escape, Mr. Shayne," Brenham said. "Harry Eversole and Jimmy Garvin are not the type of individuals who would plan something like this. They are, however, easily molded to the desires of others. I think that they went along with Drago simply for the excitement of gaining their freedom."

"All three of the men were committed here by others," Jessica Chambers put in. "We have quite a few voluntary commitments, but these three men were not free to leave any time they so desired. We had no cause to believe that they would harm anyone, though, until..."

Her face tightened under the stress of the thought, and Brenham put a hand on her arm. "Try not to think about it," he said gently.

Shayne drew Gentry aside and asked. "What happened after they killed the guard?"

"We didn't find his keys any-

where, so they must have taken them. By using them, they could have unlocked nearly anything in the place. They left by way of Dr. Brenham's office, but not before they went through his desk and files and found a couple of hundred in cash that he keeps in his office. Then they went out through a window. Most of the grounds aren't fenced in, so there was no problem for them there. They're out there somewhere now."

"Looking to do me in."

"That just about sums it up, all right. It's a bad situation, Mike. You'd better watch yourself until we get them rounded up. I wanted you to know just what was going on."

Shayne rasped a thumbnail along his jawline. "Thanks, Will," he said, "but you don't think I'm going to sit back and wait for them to be recaptured, do you?"

Gentry got an exasperated look on his face. "Now, dammit, Mike, I was afraid you'd say that. Next you're going to be saying that you want to run them down yourself."

Shayne grinned. "You've got it, Will."

"You can't do anything but cover the same ground we do."

"I know that, but sometimes a different perspective helps. I won't get in anybody's way, Will, you know that."

"Oh, no, not unless we get in your way," Gentry grumbled.

Are you sure you wouldn't rather take Lucy and go on a vacation for a few weeks? . . . I didn't think so."

Shayne turned back to the two doctors. "Do you have any information on Drago and his friends that I could take a look at? Something that would give me some background on them?"

"Of course," Jessica Chambers said. "Just a moment." She went into the nurses' station and returned a moment later with three cardboard folders. Handing them to Shayne, she said, "I can work up something even more detailed for you, but these should give you a start."

As Shayne opened the folders and flipped through them, Brenham asked, "You're going to be assisting the police then, Mr. Shayne?"

Shayne smiled slightly in the direction of Will Gentry. "It'll be an independent investigation," he said, "but of course, I'll be cooperating with Chief Gentry and his men. It's just that when someone threatens to kill me, I kind of take it personally."

There was a photograph and a brief history, mostly medical, in each folder. Shayne studied the pictures.

Drago looked like a big man, with a broad face, blue eyes set in a squint, and tousled sandy hair. Eversole was much darker, with a long, narrow face. Garvin appeared to be the youngest of

the three, barely out of his teens to judge by the photo, with brown hair.

Shayne nodded to himself. The files contained names and addresses of relatives, and that would give him a place to start. The three men might be smart enough to avoid their families, knowing that those would be the first places the authorities would check, but on the other hand, they might *not* be that smart. Shayne had been a successful detective long enough to know the value of legwork.

And he knew when it was time to get started. He said, "Thanks, Will. I'll get going now."

Gentry looked gloomy, but he said, "Listen, Mike, you be careful. And you watch out for Lucy. These guys might not be too particular about how they get back at you."

"I've already thought about that," Shayne said, his voice dropping. "Damn right I'll be careful. Careful, and quick."

His gray eyes bore an uncanny resemblance to two chips of ice.

### III

HALF AN HOUR LATER, Shayne was heading for the address that Drago's file gave for his father and younger brother, the only other members of his family in the Miami area.

Shayne had spent a few minutes talking to Tim Rourke after leaving

Gentry. He filled the reporter in on everything he knew and on his plans for the investigation, then asked him to do a favor.

"I sent Lucy home from the office," Shayne had said. "I'd appreciate it if you'd drop by there and tell her what's going on."

"And check to make sure she's okay while I'm at it, right?" Rourke guessed.

"I can't help but worry, Tim, even though I know logically that Lucy's damn capable and can take care of herself."

"Sure, Mike, I'll be glad to."

Now, as he drove, Shayne considered what he had learned from the file on Drago that Jessica Chambers had given him.

Frank Drago was the middle of three brothers. His father, Walt, had a history of trouble with the law, having served time twice for armed robbery. Drago's mother had been dead for several years, and now his older brother, Jack, was gone also. The younger brother, Brad, had had a few scrapes with the juvenile authorities but had never been in jail. Frank Drago himself had never been arrested until he attempted to jump from one of the bridges over Biscayne Bay at the height of rush hour. He had been at the Brenham Sanitarium for just under five months.

Shayne didn't know if he would find Walt and Brad Drago at home during the day or not, but he figured it was worth a try. Their

home was the closest to the Sanitarium. After checking there, Shayne planned to go on and pay visits to Harry Eversole's wife and Jimmy Garvin's parents.

The neighborhood he was in now was lower middle class, the close-together houses that had been new after the war now showing definite signs of age and wear.

Shayne pulled up in front of a house that had once been a bright yellow but which had faded to the color of sandy mud. An old station wagon sat in the driveway. Leaving the Buick at the curb, Shayne strode up the cracked walk to the little front porch.

He pressed the bell, holding it down for several long seconds. He could hear it shrilling inside the house. The curtain in the living room was flicked back for a moment, and he caught a glimpse of an angry face peering out. Then, the door was jerked open.

"Yeah?" an unfriendly voice growled. "I work nights, mister, so this better be important."

"It is," Shayne said. "Are you Walt Drago?"

"That's right. Who the hell are you?"

"I'm a detective. Your son Frank escaped from the Brenham Sanitarium last night."

Walt Drago looked shocked. He was a big man, Shayne saw through the screen door, with gray hair and a powerful build that age was starting to tear down.

He wore slacks and an undershirt.

"You say Frank's escaped?" he asked. "Are you sure?"

"I'm sure. You haven't been notified yet?"

"This is the first I've heard of it."

"How about letting me in?" Shayne asked.

"Yeah, sure." Drago unhooked the screen and opened it.

Shayne stepped inside. The air in the house was stale and smelled of beer and cigar smoke. The curtains and shades were all pulled, making the interior dim.

"Frank's in trouble, huh?" Drago said.

"That's right. A guard was killed in the escape."

Drago's lip curled. "And I guess you guys have already decided that Frank did it. Dammit, you just won't give my boys a chance!"

"I don't know who killed the guard," Shayne said flatly, "but three of them escaped and they were all in it together. That makes them all responsible, as far as I'm concerned."

Drago rubbed at the stubble on his angular jaw. "I didn't catch your name, but you look kind of familiar."

"It's Shayne, Mike Shayne."

Drago's eyes narrowed. In a harsh voice, he said, "I thought I remembered you. You ain't even a cop! You're that goddamn private eye who sent my boy Jack to prison!"

"The State of Florida sent your son to prison, Drago, not me. But he and his friends were helping to get ten-year-old kids hooked on dope. Don't expect me to feel sorry for him."

Drago glared. "So now you show up asking about Frank, wanting to send him up. Well, you'll get no help here, Shayne! Get out of my house!"

Shayne fixed his own cold glare on Drago. "You haven't seen Frank this morning?"

"I said get out of my house! I'm not going to tell you a damn thing!"

"The cops will be along any time now to ask you the same things. You might as well tell me."

Drago was about to say something else when a door leading out of the living room opened and a young man stepped through. He rubbed at sleepy-looking eyes and said, "What's going on, Pop?"

This had to be Brad Drago. Shayne could see the family resemblance. If anything, he was even bigger than his father.

Drago waved a ham-like hand at Shayne and said, "Your brother broke out of that nuthouse. This bastard here is looking for him. This is Mike Shayne, Brad, the guy who got Jack put in jail."

Brad's fists clenched. He swung toward Shayne and said, "Is that true?"

"Yeah, I'm Mike Shayne,

that much is true. But about the rest of it — ”

A stream of curses ripped out of Brad's mouth. Shayne saw the shift of his weight and was ready when Brad lunged at him, fists swinging at the end of those long arms.

Shayne ducked, letting the wild punches sail over him, then stepped inside Brad's reach and drove his knobby fists into the young man's belly. Brad gasped as the breath whooshed out of him and staggered backwards.

Shayne heard a footfall behind him and let his instincts take over. He dipped down and to one side as the elder Drago came at him from behind. Drago's fist hit nothing but empty air, and he almost fell onto Shayne's shoulder as he lost his balance.

Reaching up, Shayne clamped down on Drago's forearm and gave it a heave. With a yell, Drago went flying over Shayne's shoulder and crashed down on a spindly coffeetable, making kindling out of it.

Brad Drago had caught his breath and was moving in for another attack. Shayne blocked his first punch and threw one of his own, catching Brad on the jaw solidly. Brad took an involuntary step backwards again, this time tripping over his father and going down in a heap on the threadbare carpet of the living room.

“Now hold it, both of you!” Shayne barked. “I didn't come

here to fight. I came here looking for Frank, and I'm going to take a look through this house, whether you like it or not.”

“The hell you are!” Walt Drago started to come up off of the floor.

Shayne's hand darted beneath his coat and came out holding his pistol. The muzzle of it stared unwaveringly at the two Dragos.

“I said, whether you like it or not,” Shayne went on in a low, deadly voice. “I didn't tell you all of it. After they killed the guard, they left a note threatening that I would be next, and I don't like that. I don't like it at all.”

Drago and Brad got up carefully as Shayne covered them. He herded the two of them in front of him as he quickly searched the little house. There was no sign that the three escapees had ever been there.

“All right,” Shayne said as he went to the front door, his gun still out, “I told you the police will be along to question you. I hope you're more cooperative with them than you were with me.”

“We'll remember this, Shayne,” Walt Drago grated. “You can't just come in here and rough us up and pull a gun on us like that. I hope the cops do come. I'm gonna swear out a complaint against you.”

“You do that.”

Shayne put his gun back in its holster, but he kept his fingers curled near it as he went out to his car. Not until he was a block

away from the house did he relax and start to think about the results his visit to the Dragos had obtained.

He had antagonized them, that was for sure, but he didn't really care about that. More importantly, he had seen the look on Walt Drago's face when he learned that his son had escaped. Shayne didn't think that the man was a good enough actor to feign that kind of surprise. He and Brad hadn't known about the breakout, of that Shayne was fairly certain, and the three patients hadn't been there.

Will Gentry would probably put a surveillance team on the Drago house, for a day or two at least, hoping that Frank Drago would show up. While this morning's visit hadn't told Shayne where the three men were, it told him one place where they weren't. If he could eliminate enough such places, maybe that would point him onto another trail.

Harry Eversole's wife, Connie, was the next person on the list. Shayne flipped open the file on the seat next to him and checked the address again. It was in a better section of town, closer to the bay, and he pointed the Buick in that direction.

Eversole was not a criminal, Shayne remembered from his quick study of the file, and had never been in trouble with the law. His wife had been the one who had

signed the commitment papers. She claimed that he had threatened to kill her and then himself. The doctors at the Sanitarium had decided that he had a severe inferiority complex, and like Drago, a streak of latent paranoia. A man like Drago would probably be able to dominate him easily.

Connie Eversole's house was on a street lined with brick homes. Eversole had held a job in an accounting firm before his commitment, and it evidently had paid enough to make the payments on a nice house but not enough to pay for his mental care. Maybe Mrs. Eversole had something better to do with the money.

He pulled up in front of the house, noting the two cars in the garage. Evidently Mrs. Eversole was at home. The file made no mention of whether she worked or not.

The front door had a knocker rather than a bell. Shayne rapped it sharply a couple of times and waited.

He heard a door shut somewhere in the house, and then one of the cars in the garage started up suddenly. Shayne wheeled, crouching, as it backed out rapidly into the driveway. His hand darted toward his gun as he saw that a man was driving.

But then the man glanced in his direction as the car bounced out into the street, and Shayne saw that he wasn't one of the three



escapees. This man was a stranger.

He was debating whether to go after the fleeing man when the front door opened and a voice said, "Yes? Can I help you?"

He turned back slowly as the car squealed off down the street. A woman was standing in the door, and Shayne's craggy red eyebrows rose slightly as he got a good look at her.

She was wearing a filmy something that gaped open on top and ended where her creamy thighs began, leaving her long, slim legs bare. Chestnut hair fell to her shoulders, and she was smiling at him sweetly. It was an unusual way to answer the door, that was for sure.

"Mrs. Eversole?" Shayne asked, trying not to stare at the full breasts that had all but escaped from the gown.

"That's right. Who are you?"

"My name is Mike Shayne. I'm looking for Harry Eversole. Was that him who just left?"

He had decided to play this one a little different. This new tack might get better results with Mrs. Eversole than the steamroller method he had used on the Dragos.

The woman's lips curved in a sardonic smile. "No, that wasn't Harry," she answered. "Would that Harry had been like that . . . No, I'm sorry, but Harry doesn't live here right now."

"Oh . . ." Shayne tried to look

vaguely embarrassed. "I didn't know that the two of you . . ."

"Don't worry about it, Mr . . . Shayne, was it? Harry is in the hospital right now, the Brenham Sanitarium. If you wanted to see him on business, I'm sure someone at the firm he worked for can help you."

"No, it was personal."

Her smile widened. "Then maybe I can help you." Her eyes roamed frankly over his powerful, rangy figure. "I'm good with . . . personal things."

*I'll just bet you are*, Shayne mused to himself. He said, "If I could come in and talk to you, Then?"

"Of course." She stepped back and ushered him into the house.

She sat down on a plush sofa and curled her tanned legs beneath her. Patting the sofa beside her, she said, "Sit down, Mr. Shayne, and tell me about it."

He sat, feeling the warmth of her as she pressed her thigh against his. They were close enough so that he could see flecks of gold in her greenish eyes. Her breasts brushed against his arm, and he felt strong urges deep inside him. She was magnificent . . . !

She was also a stranger, and the wife of a man who might be trying to kill him. Shayne had no trouble forcing those urges back down and saying, "Have you seen your husband lately, Mrs. Eversole?"

"Call me Connie."

"All right, Connie. How long since you've seen Harry?"

She sighed. "Almost six months, Mike. You don't mind if I call you Mike? Anyway, Harry has had a rough time of it. The doctors at the hospital said it might be better if I didn't come see him for a while."

"They thought you might upset him, huh? I can see why. Having a beautiful wife like you on the outside, when he's on the inside. I'm sure it's been tough on you, too."

"It has. But I manage to console myself."

"The guy who left just as I got here . . . Was he a little bit of consolation?"

Connie had gone far past the stage where such a question would bring on a blush. She put a hand on Shayne's chest and said, "I'm sure you could be much more consoling."

Shayne ran a finger down her cheek. "Aren't you afraid we might be interrupted?"

"By who?" she whispered. He could feel her hot breath in his ear.

"By the police," he said flatly. "Harry escaped last night, and he may have killed a guard in the process."

She jerked away from him, eyes going wide with surprise. "What?" she gasped. "Harry's loose?"

"That's right," Shayne an-

swered. "You haven't seen him, have you?"

"Good Lord, of course I haven't seen him!" She paled. "Oh, God, if he had come in a little earlier —"

"He might had made good on that threat he made to kill you. I imagine he got pretty tired of wearing horns, didn't he?"

She stared at him. "Just who the hell are you?"

"I told you —"

"Mike Shayne! I remember that name now. You're that private detective. You're looking for Harry, aren't you?"

"I told you that, too," Shayne said dryly. "I'm looking for Harry, and for the two men who escaped with him."

Connie stood up and took two steps backward, away from him. Her hand had gone to her bosom, drawing the gown shut. It was diaphanous enough so that the gesture did little good.

"I haven't seen him," she declared. "I don't want to see him! He's crazy, just like I've said all along. I'm going to call the police —"

"They'll be here soon enough. I'm conducting my own investigation, though, and I seem to be a little ahead of them."

"But Harry — if he's loose, he's liable to —"

"If you like, I'm sure the cops will put a guard on the house. They're just as interested in catching Harry as you are. If you

don't mind, though, I'd like to take a look through the house."

"Go right ahead! Now that I know he's loose, I'm afraid he might be lurking around here somewhere!"

Shayne went through the house finding nothing. When he returned to the living room, he saw that Connie Eversole had wrapped herself in a woolen bathrobe. It removed quite a bit of distraction.

He asked her, "Do you know of any other place Harry might have gone?"

After a moment of thought, she answered, "No, not really. Harry doesn't have many friends, none that would hide him out. I'm afraid I can't help you, Mike."

"I'd better get going, then. I've got other leads to check out."

She reached out and put a hand on his arm. "Do you have to go? I — I'm frightened here by myself."

"The cops should be here soon." He moved away from her and then paused in the door. "If you're worried, why don't you call the guy I scared off?"

She sniffed. "Warren? He may be good for some things, Mike, but I sure as hell wouldn't want him for a bodyguard."

Shayne quirked an eyebrow, shrugged his shoulders, and shut the door behind him.

office, since it was on the way. Jimmy Garvin's parents lived on the south side of town, and it was easy to swing by Flagler Street.

The office looked vacant without Lucy in it, as it always did when she was gone. Shayne settled down into the chair behind his desk and reached for the phone. He wanted to give her a call and make sure she was all right before he went on with the investigation.

It rang under his fingers. Plucking up the receiver and putting it to his ear, Shayne said, "Yeah?"

"Hello, Mike." It was Will Gentry's gravelly voice. "I was hoping I would catch you."

"What's up, Will? Anything turn up yet?"

"Nothing good," Gentry growled. "I've got men out working on it, of course, but when I got back here a little while ago, I found a report on my desk. There was a liquor store hold-up earlier this morning."

"So?"

"The store was robbed by three men. The descriptions match. They're armed now, Mike, and they've got civilian clothes."

Shayne sighed. "That's only to be expected, Will."

"That's not all. They gunned down the owner of the store before they left. There was no provocation, according to the witnesses. It was just sheer

#### IV

SHAYNE'S NEXT STOP was his

slaughter for the sake of killing. The old guy was seventy-four."

Shayne grimaced. "That's bad, Will."

"Damn right. We've got some mad dogs on our hands, Mike, and the sooner we grab them, the better. Have you come up with anything?"

"I've been to Drago's and Eversole's. They haven't been there. You won't get much co-operation from any of the Dragos, but Mrs. Eversole seems eager for her husband to be caught. I thought I'd go out to see Garvin's parents next."

"You're a little ahead of us, then. You know, Mike, sometimes you damn lone wolf operators can mess things up for the rest of us."

Despite the overriding tension of the situation, Shayne had to grin at the exasperation in Gentry's voice. "You just wish you could do a little howling yourself," he giped. "I'll be talking to you, Will."

He pushed the disconnect button down and then dialed a number himself. It was answered on the second ring.

"Hello, Angel," Shayne said. "Everything under control there?"

"Of course, Michael. Tim stopped by a little earlier and filled me in on what's happening. I think it's awful that those men want to kill you."

"I'm not crazy about the idea

myself. Tim's not still there, is he?"

"No, he's already left. He said he was going back to the paper, though. You can catch him there."

"I'll give him a call later. Right now, I don't have anything to report, Angel." He debated for a moment about whether or not to tell her about the liquor store hold-up, then decided to go ahead. Leaving her in the dark about any aspect of this case might only increase the danger to her.

He could hear her cluck of sympathy and dismay as he told her what had happened. He went on, "This just underlines the necessity of you staying right where you are, Angel. Don't let anybody in but me or Tim or Gentry. Don't even trust a cop unless you know him personally."

"Of course, Michael. And while I'm hiding out here, I suppose you're going to be running around putting your life on the line."

"Something like that."

"It's not fair, Michael."

"Maybe not . . . but it's the way we have to play it. For now, anyway."

Lucy sighed. "You're a frustrating man, Michael Shayne."

"So I've been told," he clucked. "I'll talk to you later, Angel."

They said goodbye tenderly and then Shayne hung up. He leaned back in his chair for a moment and smoked a cigarette, watching the smoke as it curled up toward the ceiling. He wondered which one

of the three had pulled the trigger on the old man. His instincts said Drago. Shayne had little doubt that it had been Drago who had killed the guard at the hospital and left that note. Eversole and Garvin had no connection with him, Shayne mused. It had to be Drago behind the whole thing.

Moments later, the big detective was back on the street, headed for the address given in Jimmy Garvin's file.

In a way, Garvin's was the saddest case of the three. Drago came from a family background that partially assured trouble somewhere along the way, and if Eversole's problems stemmed from his wife, as Shayne suspected, well, he had been the one with the bad judgment to marry her. But Garvin came from a good family and had a sterling reputation. He had been a good student and an all-city football player in high school, had attended two years of college, and had been generally well-liked until the previous year, when something askew in his head had caused him to start skulking through his neighbors' yards at night, peering in their windows. The police hadn't caught him, but the neighbors had, and only his parents' agreement to have him committed had kept him out of jail.

Notes in the file by Drs. Brenham and Chambers indicated that

Garvin was a good patient, but that they still had not gotten to the root of his troubles.

The Garvins lived in a neighborhood much like the one where Walt and Brad Drago lived, but their property was kept up much better. The neat little house had a fresh coat of paint on it, and flowers bloomed in beds on both sides of the porch. When Shayne rang the bell, it was answered almost immediately.

The woman who opened the door was tall and slim with dark blonde hair that was literally sprinkled with gray. She smiled at Shayne, but he could tell that her heart wasn't in it. Her eyes had a reddish tinge that could have come from crying. She said, "Yes?"

"Mrs. Garvin?"

"That's right."

"My name is Shayne . . ." He hesitated. He didn't want to deceive this woman, and he certainly didn't want to bully her. He said, "I'm here about your son, Jimmy . . ."

"Yes, I thought so. I've already heard about it. Come in, please."

It looked like Will Gentry's men had beaten him to this one. The stop at his office must have enabled them to catch up.

Mrs. Garvin led him into a comfortable living room and offered him coffee after he had settled down in an armchair. He shook his head and said, "No, but thanks. You said you

knew about it. Has someone already questioned you?"

She sat down on a sofa and absently rearranged some knick-knacks on the coffee table. "Yes, a man was here just a few minutes ago, telling me that Jimmy had escaped from the hospital and asking if I had seen him. I'm rather upset by this whole matter, Mr. Shayne . . ."

"Of course."

"But Jimmy hasn't been here. That's what I told the other man, and it was the truth. You can look through the house if you like."

Shayne felt a little out of place in this neat-as-a-pin living room. He moved in rougher circles most of the time. He said gently, "I don't doubt you, Mrs. Garvin. We're trying to find Jimmy for his own sake, as well as others."

She nodded, "I'm glad. Jimmy is a good boy, Mr. Shayne. You would have to know him to appreciate that."

"He left the hospital with some people who aren't so nice, though, Mrs. Garvin. Did the other man who was here tell you everything that happened?"

Some of the color went out of her face. "If you mean about that poor man who was killed, yes, he did. I'm sure that Jimmy had nothing to do with it, though. Those other men probably made Jimmy go with them. He . . . he's rather a gullible boy at times, Mr. Shayne. They probably talked him into it, and now he's afraid to

leave them. The world . . . the world tends to frighten him sometimes."

Shayne was silent for a moment, then asked, "Is your husband here, Mrs. Garvin?"

"No. Ed is a truck driver. He's on a run now, but he should be back tomorrow."

"Do you know of any place where Jimmy might go? Does he have any close friends?"

She shook her head. "Not any more. He used to be very popular, but that ended when his problems began. I'm sorry, Mr. Shayne. I'd like to help you. You don't know how much I'd like to help you. But unless Jimmy comes here, I just don't know where he might be."

Another dead end, Shayne realized grudgingly. He had had three leads to check, and he had come up empty three times. It wasn't really that surprising, but he had hoped to come up with something by now.

"The police will probably be keeping an eye on this place," he said. "Just in case Jimmy or the others might come here."

She looked up at him. "Aren't you with the police?"

"I'm a private detective, but I've worked with Chief Gentry many times before. I'm conducting my own investigation into this case."

"Why is a private detective interested in something like this?"

Shayne couldn't stop himself



from being blunt. "Because when your son and the others escaped, they left a note threatening my life."

She put a hand to her mouth. "But Jimmy . . . He doesn't even know you . . ."

"One of the other men thinks I had something to do with the death of his brother. The police and I think he's the one who planned the escape." Shayne stood up. "I hope I haven't alarmed you any further, Mrs. Garvin."

"No. This last year has been such that I don't think I can be shocked or alarmed much more, Mr. Shayne."

He thanked her for her cooperation and started out toward his Buick. When he was less than halfway down the walk, another car pulled up behind his. Two men got out and started toward him. Shayne recognized both of them.

"Hello, Hodges," he nodded to one of them. "What are you and Monroe doing here?"

Hodges and Monroe were two of Gentry's detectives whom Shayne knew slightly. They looked at him a little askance, and Hodges said, "Same as you, Shayne. Trying to track down those crazies that busted out last night."

Shayne frowned. "I thought one of your guys had already been here."

Both of them looked puzzled. Monroe said, "Not that I know of."

We've been spending the day chasing your tail around, Shayne. You sure can stir things up. If I was Gentry, I think I'd put a leash on you."

"You might try," Shayne said tightly. "But Mrs. Garvin said that somebody had already talked to her."

"So let's all go talk to her now," Hodges suggested.

Shayne rang the bell again. Mrs. Garvin looked surprised when she opened the door and saw Shayne standing there flanked by the two plainclothes detectives.

Shayne said, "Sorry to bother you again, Mrs. Garvin, but I'd like to ask you about the man who was here earlier. This is Detective Hodges and Detective Monroe from the Miami Police."

Both men flashed their tin, and Shayne asked, "Did the other man show you his badge, Mrs. Garvin, or offer any kind of identification?"

"Why — why, no. I just assumed he was from the police. Wasn't he?"

"No, ma'am," Hodges said. "We don't believe he was a policeman. We always identify ourselves right away, as a matter of policy."

"Then . . . who was he?"

"Can you describe him?"

"Well, he was tall, a little taller than average, I'd say, and he had dark hair. He was rather pale, too, like he doesn't get out in the sun much."

Shayne and the two police

detectives exchanged glances. While that was as good a description as most citizens could provide, it was still vague and rang no bells with Shayne. Hodges and Monroe shook their heads slightly.

"Thank you, Mrs. Garvin," Shayne said. "I think these gentlemen want to talk to you for a few minutes, but I have to be going."

"Do us a favor, Shayne," Hodges said. "Give Gentry a call and tell him about this, will you?"

Nodding, Shayne turned away and started down the walk a second time, when Mrs. Garvin called out his name and stopped him. He turned around. She was standing on the porch between the two detectives, but she was looking at him. She said, "If . . . if you find Jimmy, Mr. Shayne, will you try to see that he doesn't get hurt?"

Shayne's lips tightened. There was no way he could promise that, and yet . . .

"I'll do what I can," he heard himself saying.

He drove away as Mrs. Garvin went in the house with Hodges and Monroe. Worried lines had etched themselves into his rugged face. He had no more idea than Hodges and Monroe about who the first man to visit Mrs. Garvin had been, but one thing was certain.

A third party was taking an interest in the escapees.

And for the life of him, Shayne couldn't see why.

## SHAYNE WAS TURNING OVER

this new angle to the case in his head as he drove, but the fact that he was concentrating on one thing didn't make him blind to others. His years as a detective had sharpened his senses and trained him to be instinctively watchful. So it came as no surprise to him when he realized that he was being followed.

The tail was driving a blue Toyota and was staying two or three cars behind Shayne's Buick. Once Shayne had spotted him, the big detective made several quick turns, designed to confirm the suspicion that he was being followed. The Toyota hung right in. Shayne rubbed a hand over his rugged jaw and considered.

First there had been the business of someone else poking into the investigation, and now this. The two could very well be connected, Shayne knew. It was very possible that the man back there in the little Japanese car was the one who had paid a visit to Mrs. Garvin.

Shayne's curiosity was definitely aroused now. He put the Buick through a few basic moves, taking turns at the last minute and suchlike, but the tail stayed in place. So the man wasn't a total amateur. Shayne's mouth curved in a tight grin, and he pressed down harder on the accelerator.

He wheeled into an alley and tromped the gas. The Buick

fairly leaped down the littered corridor. Shayne glanced in the rearview mirror and saw the Toyota entering the alley just as he was exiting. He spun the wheel sharply to the left.

When the Toyota emerged from the alley a few seconds later, Shayne's Buick was nowhere to be seen. The boulevard stretched out straight on both sides for many blocks, but the redheaded investigator had vanished. The man driving the Toyota looked both ways in consternation for a long moment, then resignedly turned and headed west.

Shayne watched with a grin from his hiding place in the middle of a huge used car lot across the street. He knew the owner of the dealership, and he had known that there would in all likelihood be an empty slot somewhere in the lot. Sure enough, he had found one easily. By removing his hat and crouching slightly, Shayne had rendered the Buick practically invisible among its own kind.

Shayne straightened and pulled the car out of the lot with a friendly wave at the salesman who were staring at him. The Toyota was several blocks down the street by now. Shayne headed in the same direction.

The erstwhile follower would have no reason to suspect that he was being followed himself now. Shayne was able to hang well back as he tailed the man. Midday traffic was fairly heavy, and he

wasn't worried about being spotted.

Traffic began to thin slightly, though, as the Toyota proceeded toward the industrial and warehouse district. Shayne was more careful now, keeping at least three cars between them at all times. When he saw the Toyota pull off the road and into the parking lot of a warehouse several blocks up the street, he immediately turned off, too, stopping in the lot of the last fast-food outlet on this street.

There were a pair of high-powered binoculars in the glove compartment. Shayne snatched them out and put them to his eyes. He had a clear view of the Toyota and its driver as the man got out.

He was tall and had dark hair. Even through the binoculars, Shayne could tell that his skin was pale. It was the man who had spoken to Mrs. Garvin, all right. Shayne was sure of that, and he was equally sure that he had never seen him before.

Shayne made a mental note of the Toyota's license number, then watched as the man climbed some metal steps to a loading dock. The door of the warehouse was open, but the interior was too dim for Shayne to tell what was inside.

As he looked on, three more men came out of the warehouse to join the first one on the dock. Two of the newcomers were tall and broad and looked slightly

uncomfortable in their suits. Muscle, Shayne decided, protection for the third newcomer.

That man was small, trimly built, and dapper, with sleek dark hair. Sunglasses hid his eyes, but Shayne caught the wind of sunlight reflecting off the jewelry on his hands.

Shayne grunted. The dapper man, with his two bodyguards, fairly reeked of organized crime. Shayne could almost smell the scent of the mob, even at this distance.

The driver of the Toyota was talking rapidly, and the dapper man's face was becoming set and angry. The driver was explaining that he had lost his quarry, Shayne guessed.

The dapper man interrupted, spoke sharply for a moment, then turned on his heel and stalked back into the warehouse, his two myrmidons right behind him. The driver of the Toyota stood on the dock a moment longer, looking crestfallen, then went back to his car and drove off.

Shayne put the binoculars back in the glove compartment and then lit a cigarette. He wanted to take a minute to think about this.

The only possible connection between the three escapees and a gangland figure that Shayne could see would be Frank Drago's brother, Jack. Anytime someone was running drugs, the possibility of such a tie-in existed. But to the

best of Shayne's memory, the gang that Jack Drago had been involved with had consisted solely of small-timers who had banded together to pull off one big job. Shayne and the police had effectively busted the gang up, and as far as he knew, all of them had been captured and were now serving time.

But if Shayne assumed that the dapper man had no connection with Jack Drago, then that left him with no answers at all. He tugged briefly at his earlobe as he thought. The first thing to do was identify the man, and he didn't know of any better place to start than with Gentry and Rourke.

Using the radio-telephone under the Buick's dash, Shayne put in a call to Will Gentry at police headquarters first. When the gravel-voiced chief came on the line, Shayne said, "This is Mike, Will. How about meeting me for lunch?"

"I was planning on working straight through," Gentry said, "like I usually do."

"You can tear yourself away from a stale sandwich and cardboard coffee for once. I may have come up with a new angle on this thing, and I want to talk it over with you and Tim. Meet me at the Beef House in twenty minutes?"

"All right. I'll be there."

Shayne broke the connection, called the *Miami Daily News*, and discovered that Tim Rourke had already left for lunch. To

Shayne, that meant there was a good chance Rourke was already at the Beef House.

That guess was confirmed when Shayne entered the friendly little tavern and restaurant ten minutes later. Rourke was in the booth that he usually frequented, a freshly made drink in front of him. He lifted a hand in greeting as Shayne slid onto the seat opposite him.

"Still alive and kicking, I see," Rourke commented.

Shayne raised a finger at the bartender, who immediately started fixing the big redhead's usual. Leaning back against the plush seat, Shayne said, "No sign of Drago or the other two so far. I guess you heard that they held up a liquor store and killed the owner, didn't you?"

Rourke nodded. "Yeah. That was tough. I hope you and the cops catch up to those guys soon."

Shayne agreed, then sampled the drink that the waiter placed in front of him. The Martell was smooth as silk. Shayne took a healthy swallow.

"I've run across something puzzling," he said. "Will is going to meet us here in a few minutes, and I want to see if I can jog your memories."

"What's it about?"

"Somebody else besides the cops and myself is looking for those three guys, and I can't figure out why."

Rourke was about to ask more

questions when Shayne nodded toward the entrance and said, "There's Gentry."

The chief spotted them and angled across the room toward the booth. Rourke moved over to make room for him. Gentry eased his bulk onto the seat, took the foul cigar from his mouth, and said, "You were right, Mike. Whatever they serve here is going to beat the hell out of what I usually get at the station. Now, what's going on?"

Shayne started to explain but was interrupted again by the waiter. They placed their orders, Gentry was supplied with a beer, and then Shayne said, "Let me throw a description at you and see if you can put a name with it. He's in his late thirties or early forties, about five-nine, maybe a hundred and fifty pounds. Dark hair, medium length; he dresses very well and wears jewelry and sunglasses. There were two musclemen siding him, and I got a definite feeling that he was part of the mob."

Rourke and Gentry both concentrated as Shayne spoke. Rourke asked, "Where did you see him?"

"Down in the warehouse district."

Rourke shook his head and said, "Sorry, Mike."

Gentry frowned for a moment longer, then said, "It sounds like it might be a hood named Bowman, but I couldn't be sure with-

out seeing a picture."

"Yeah," Rourke said suddenly, remembrance dawning on his face. "Victor Bowman, right, Will? I had heard that he moved down here."

"Who's Bowman?" Shayne asked.

"He was an underboss in New Jersey," Gentry answered. "He had a finger in just about everything, but dope was his main concern. If the story I heard is right, though, he got a little too big for his britches and then slipped up. Had to close up shop and leave the state. The family leaders let him come down here to get a fresh start."

"Is it possible that he could have been tied in with the gang Jack Drago was part of?"

Gentry shook his head. "We broke that gang up well over a year ago. Bowman was still in Jersey then."

"How did you happen to run across Bowman, Mike, if that's how it was?" Rourke asked.

"Somebody talked to Mrs. Garvin and was looking for her son before Will's boys or I ever showed up," Shayne said. "A little later, I spotted somebody tailing me, so I got behind him and took up the tail myself. The guy following me was the same one who had talked to Mrs. Garvin earlier. After I lost him, I watched him report back to his boss, who could be this Victor Bowman, according to you two."

"Are you working on any other cases?"

"Not right now. Nothing but this escape business."

Rourke's lean face wrinkled in a frown. "What the hell does a hood like Bowman have to do with three mental patients?"

"That's what I'd like to know," Shayne said, and tossed down the rest of his drink.

Their food arrived then, and the three of them dug in with a passion. Gentry frowned at the pile of food on Rourke's plate and commented to Shayne, "I had forgotten how much he can eat."

Shayne just grinned.

He filled both of them in on how he had spent the morning, and they spent the rest of the meal kicking around the various angles of the case. They came up with no new conclusions, though.

When Shayne was finished, he asked, "Is there any chance you could come up with a picture of Bowman, Will?"

"I can give it a try. I'll call the boys over at the FBI. They should have a photo of him."

Gentry made the call from a pay phone just inside the door of the Beef House and spoke to the agent in charge of the Miami office. After he hung up, the chief said to Shayne, "Come on back to headquarters with me, Mike. They're going to go through their files and shoot the picture right over if they can come up with one."

Rourke said, "I'd like to tag along, fellas, but you know how it is with the working press. Always busy."

Gentry made a rude comment about the working press that got a laugh from Rourke. Shayne smiled and gave the bony reporter a lackadaisical wave as he drove off.

Shayne and Gentry returned to police headquarters, and Shayne joined the chief in his office to wait for the arrival of the photograph. While they were waiting, he used Gentry's phone to call Lucy's apartment.

It was a relief to hear her sweetly-accented voice as she said, "Hello?" Shayne smiled and said, "It's me, Angel. Everything quiet over there?"

"Quiet as the grave. Oh, that was a bad choice of words, wasn't it?"

Shayne chuckled. "Don't worry about it. I just wanted to let you know that we're still looking for those three guys. I haven't come up with anything so far, except for a funny angle we haven't figured out."

He explained quickly about Bowman. There had been times in the past when he had kept things from Lucy for her own safety, but usually he discussed his cases fully with her. More than once, she had made a connection or seen the significance of something that he had not.

While he was talking, the door

to Gentry's office opened and a uniformed officer came in carrying an envelope. Shayne told Lucy that the picture was there, said his goodbyes quickly, and hung up. Gentry was opening the envelope.

The photograph slid out onto the desk. It wasn't a mug shot, since according to Gentry, Bowman had never been arrested, but it was a good, clear picture, a head and shoulders shot that had to have been taken with a telephoto lens. Shayne had only to glance at it to be sure.

"That's him," he said grimly as he nodded. "That's the guy who's sticking his nose in, for God knows what reason."

## VI

SHAYNE LEFT headquarters a few minutes later, after thanking Gentry for obtaining the picture. The chief had asked him, "What are you going to do now?"

Shayne frowned. "Knowing for sure who Bowman is doesn't put us one step closer to those killers. Finding them has got to be the top priority. After they're under wraps, then we'll have time to figure out Bowman's connection. So I think I'll go back out to the Sanitarium. I'd like to talk some more to those doctors. Maybe, in one of their sessions, Drago or one of the others might have said something that would give us a lead to where they are now."



He was sure that the Sanitarium would have more complete files on the three men than the ones that he had been given that morning. An hour or so spent pouring over those files and questioning Drs. Brenham and Chambers might just result in a new trail to follow.

He was about halfway to the Sanitarium when he glanced in the rearview mirror and caught a flash of blue. A closer watch revealed that the Toyota had returned. Shayne sighed. The guy was back for another try.

Shayne's mouth set in a tight line. He had pondered the question of why Victor Bowman was having him followed and had not come up with any answers. Maybe now it was time to go right to the source with his questions.

He slowed down. There was one car between him and the Toyota, and it passed him a few moments later, leaving Shayne a clear field in which to operate. They were cruising down a wide boulevard, with several apartment houses on one side and a city park on the other. Despite the mildness of the day, the park was nearly deserted, since school was in session.

Shayne sped up a little bit, widening the distance between the Buick and the Toyota. There was a driveway up ahead on the left, leading between two of the apartment houses. Shayne swung the Buick into it as if he was turning normally, then stomped the brake

and slammed the car into reverse. His foot hit the gas, and the Buick jumped back out into the street crosswise, blocking most of both lanes.

The driver of the Japanese car braked sharply. He had sped up when Shayne did, and he nearly plowed into the rear of the Buick before the brakes caught and held. He tried to back up himself, but by that time, Shayne was out of his car and hurrying toward him.

Shayne's right hand hovered near the butt of his gun, just in case, and he reached for the door handle of the Toyota with his left. The driver had jammed the lock button down, though, and the door wouldn't open.

"Come out of there!" Shayne roared. The man looked panicky. He had gotten a good tongue-lashing from Bowman for losing Shayne the first time. What would the mobster have in mind as punishment for this development?

Shayne didn't want to pull his gun out on the street like this if he could help it. He started around to the other side of the car.

"This was ridiculous. That side was locked, too. Shayne muttered, "Damn!" He peered in through the windshield. The man was fumbling around with something in the floorboard . . .

Something that came up with two cold steel eyes to stare at Shayne.

He cursed again and threw himself backwards as the driver's

door popped open. The shotgun boomed, and Shayne could hear the pellets whistling through the air around him. They plinked against the body of the Buick.

Shayne rolled over the trunk of the Buick, jerking his pistol free as he did so. The shotgun had another barrel to go. The man was wild-eyed now as he aimed at Shayne and pulled the second trigger.

This load of buckshot also poured into the Buick. One of the pellets plucked Shayne's hat from his head. Almost growling in anger, the big detective returned the fire, causing the man to duck behind the safety of his own car.

This could get sticky if the man had more shells. Traffic had no choice but to come to a stop since the road was blocked, and there were far too many innocent bystanders starting to appear.

The man wasn't firing anymore, though. Shayne poked his head up and saw that the man had dropped the shotgun and was sprinting away across the park. Shayne sprang to his feet and took out after him.

The man had a good start, but Shayne's long legs ate up the ground and cut the distance between them. He ran with a grace and efficiency unusual in a man of his size, and the race would have been over quickly under normal circumstances.

But then Shayne heard a cry of pain up ahead and rounded a bush

to see a girl in jogging shorts and pullover sprawled beside the path. She was clutching her ankle and grimacing. Shayne's quarry was pounding away down the path.

"He ran right over me!" the girl howled.

Shayne dropped into a crouch beside her and looked at the swelling ankle. "I don't think it's broken," he said shortly. "Stay off it, and I'll send somebody to help you."

Then he was back at the chase, having lost a little ground to the interruption.

The path that ran through this part of the park was popular with joggers, and both Shayne and his prey had to dodge the runners, who began to dive off the path when they saw what was coming toward them. Shayne narrowed the gap steadily. The man kept looking back over his shoulder, fear evident on his face. Shayne had a feeling that it was more fear of failure than fear of him. Judging by his demeanor, Bowman would be a hard man to work for.

When Shayne judged that he was close enough, he left his feet in a dive. His arms wrapped around the man's legs, and they both crashed roughly to the dusty path.

The man twisted around, swinging wildly at Shayne. The big redhead slipped some of the punches with his forearm and took

the rest on his shoulders. He threw a punch of his own that clipped the man's temple, but lost his balance in the process.

A flailing hand found his throat and latched on, claw-like. Shayne tore at it with one hand while pounding blows into the man's body with the other. He could feel the fingers digging for his trachea, seeking to crush it.

Anger and frustration surged through Shayne. The other man was panting as he fought. With a snarl, Shayne knocked the grip on his throat loose and then drove his fist into the man's face. A second powerful punch followed on the heels of the first.

The man's head bounced off the hard-packed ground and he gave a sobbing moan. He went limp under Shayne.

Shayne rolled off him and sat up, catching his breath and rubbing his bruised throat. There had been the strength of desperation in the man's grip.

A crowd was gathering as Shayne stood up, among them two policemen from a patrol car that had stopped to investigate the traffic jam. They started asking brusque questions until Shayne identified himself and told them that the man was involved in a case on which Chief Gentry himself was working. One of the cops left to check on the injured girl.

The man whom Shayne nabbed was starting to regain consciousness now. Shayne knelt beside

him and took hold of his arm.

"Bowman won't like it when he finds out I caught you, instead of the other way around," Shayne gritted. "So why don't you save us both some trouble and tell me what it's all about."

The man's muttered answer was obscene enough to make one of the women standing nearby gasp. Disgusted, Shayne jerked the man to his feet and handed him over to the officer. "You might as well put him in your car and take him downtown," he said. "I'm sure Gentry will have a few questions for him. I'll go back and get my car out of the street and follow you in."

He tried to brush some of the dust of the path off his suit as he walked. The crowd began to disperse, murmuring to one another. The officer brought Shayne's captive along, the man's face a study in fear and frustration.

Shayne coughed, trying to clear some of the pain from his throat. The cough almost drowned out the sound of a bullet cracking through the air past his ear.

Moving on instinct, Shayne threw himself to one side as someone screeched in pain behind him. He rolled as he landed and came up in a crouch, his gun leveled and ready. He knew by the sound that the slug had passed within inches of his head.

A glance told him that it had found a home in the chest of the

man he had just captured. He was crumpled in a heap on the ground, with a quickly spreading stain on his shirt. The cop, visibly shaken by having the man literally shot out of his grip, stood over him with drawn pistol.

"Over there!" Shayne snapped, pointing at the row of apartment complexes across the street from the park. He broke into a run.

He had spotted a man carrying something that could have been a rifle. The man ducked into an alley that led into the middle of the warren of apartments.

Again, people got out of Shayne's way. The detective forced his muscles to carry him even faster than before. He threaded his way through the jumble of cars in the street and headed down the same alley.

His head was spinning with the implications of what had just happened. He had wanted some answers from the driver of the Toyota, and he was confident that he and Gentry could have gotten them. It wouldn't be that way now, though. Not the way that blood stain had been growing by the second.

He ran down the alley for a good five minutes before he came to a stop. The chase was hopeless, and he knew it. There were hundreds of apartments that the sniper could have ducked into, or he could have had a car ready and might be miles away by now. He hadn't unloosed anymore shots at

Shayne, that much was sure. Shayne holstered his own pistol disgustedly and began to walk to his car.

It was back to square one, and he didn't like it one bit.

## VII

IT WAS ALSO BACK to police headquarters. Shayne's original plan to pay another visit to the Brenham Sanitarium would have to be postponed.

He dictated his statement on what had happened to a police stenographer in Will Gentry's office. Gentry kept quiet during the account, glaring at Shayne and shifting his cigar stub from one side of his mouth to the other.

When the steno had left to type up the statement, Gentry finally erupted. "Dammit, Mike," he barked, "this isn't the Wild West! Can't you make it through a few weeks without having a gun battle in the streets?"

"I'd like to, Will. Something about my personality must offend people. They seem to shoot at me a lot."

"It's your blasted Irish impulsiveness that causes it! You always jump into something with both feet, but you never think about where you'll land!"

"On somebody's head that deserves it, usually," Shayne grunted.

"All right, all right. I heard your statement, but what do you

think really happened? Was this Drago's first move against you?"

Shayne lit a cigarette. "I've been thinking about that. The way I see it, there are two possibilities. One is that Drago or one of his friends pulled the trigger, in which case they missed, because I would have been the target. On the other hand, somebody could have meant to knock off that guy, in which case it was a damn good shot. That's the theory I'm leaning toward."

Gentry threw the cigar butt at the wastebasket and missed as usual. "Then you think somebody didn't want us asking him any questions?"

"Somebody being his boss, Victor Bowman. It makes sense to me, Will."

"Whatever connection Bowman has with those three escaped nuts, it must be something big," Gentry mused, "or else he wouldn't have had one of his own men killed."

"That's the way I see it," Shayne agreed. "He must have had somebody backing up the guy I cornered, just in case."

"So what do we do now?"

"I'm going through with what I planned earlier," Shayne stood up and stretched weary muscles. "I'm heading out to the Sanitarium again. I still want to talk some more to those doctors."

This time the trip to Dr. Eric Brenham's private hospital was uneventful. Shayne hoped he wasn't wasting his time.

An officer was still on duty in the lobby of the Sanitarium when Shayne got there, but he recognized the rugged, redheaded investigator and merely nodded to him. Shayne found a door marked *Dr. Chambers* and knocked on it.

A soft voice told him to come in. Jessica Chambers looked up from the papers spread on her desk as he entered, and her full lips curved in a smile. "Hello, Mr. Shayne," she said. "Have you or the police made any progress in finding our patients?"

"I'm afraid not," he said. "That's why I'm here. I'd like to talk to you and Dr. Brenham."

"Dr. Brenham is in a session right now, but I'd be glad to help you any way I can. Please, sit down."

Shayne sat in the chair in front of her desk and said, "I'd like to know whatever you can tell me about Drago and Eversole and Garvin. A look at your detailed files on them might help, too."

She looked slightly embarrassed. "Well, Mr. Shayne —"

"Mike."

"All right . . . Mike. I'm afraid that there are certain doctor-patient privileges that have to be respected. I — I just can't tell you everything that those men have said to me during therapy sessions. It wouldn't be ethical."

Shayne leaned forward. "I understand that, Dr. Chambers —"

"Please. If you're Mike, I'm

Jessica. One of the fundamentals of communication is an equal footing."

Shayne gave her a taut grin. "Sure. But as I was saying, Jessica, these guys want to kill me. They've already killed a guard here and an old man on the outside. I don't think that's ethical, either."

Jessica looked down at her desk for a long moment, obviously debating with herself. Finally, she looked up and said, "All right, Mike. I'll tell you everything I know, and I'll let you look at my files on the patients. But this will have to be between you and me. Dr. Brenham mustn't find out; he wouldn't understand or accept any violation of a patient's rights."

She stood up and went to a filing cabinet in the corner of the office. As she looked through it, she said, "I don't think Eric would be much help to you in this matter, anyway. He deals more with his own private clients. The patients in the other wing are more my responsibility."

As she searched through the files for the ones on the escapees, Shayne couldn't help but admire the sleek curves of her nylon-clad legs. The dress she wore under the loose white coat revealed a good figure. She was obviously intelligent, and Shayne thought that it had been quite a while since he had seen a woman as genuinely appealing.

There was a hint of interest in

her own eyes as she sat back down with the thick files in her hand. She spread them out on the desk, and Shayne leaned forward even more to look at them. He caught a whiff of some subtle, fragrant perfume.

This might turn out to be a pleasant afternoon after all, despite the errand he had come on, he thought.

It was an afternoon filled for the most part with work, though, as he and Jessica went over the files intensively. He read all three of them through, and he asked scores of questions. His knowledge of psychiatry was sketchy, but with Jessica to guide him, he learned a lot more about the lives and troubles of the three fugitives than he expected to. He didn't agree with all of Jessica's conclusions, naturally being a little harsher in his judgment of the three than she, but it made for several hours of fascinating conversation.

And it didn't help a bit.

"Blast it," Shayne growled when he looked at his watch and saw that the afternoon was gone. "I hoped that this would give me some idea where to look for them, maybe someplace that one of them had always talked about going, but there's just nothing like that in here."

"I'm sorry, Mike," Jessica said, laying her slender hand on top of his brawny one. "I was hoping, too. But I had already

thought about that possibility, and I couldn't remember any of them ever talking about anyplace special."

Shayne sighed. "I hate to admit it, but I don't know where to go with this case next."

"In that event," Jessica said, "how about taking me out to dinner."

Shayne stared at her in surprise for a moment, then broke into laughter. "Okay, sure, why not. We've both been working pretty hard. We can relax for awhile. When should I pick you up?"

"I have quarters over in the other wing. If you don't mind waiting for a few minutes while I freshen up, we can go right now."

"You live here in the hospital?"

"Oh, no, not all the time. I have an apartment, too. The room here is just a functional one, for when I have to stay overnight in case of an emergency."

Shayne said, "I don't mind waiting, if we can run by my place so I can grab a shower and shave. I've had kind of an active day."

"I can imagine."

He didn't have to wait long for her. She reappeared, minus the white coat and wearing a different dress that made her look even better. Their conversation was pleasant as Shayne drove over to his apartment. He tried to steer the talk away from the current case for the moment, preferring to hear more about Jessica and her work.

He felt a slight twinge of guilt as he led Jessica into his apartment. Turning to her, he said, "I'd like to make one phone call, too."

"Of course."

He hoped his voice didn't sound unusual when Lucy answered and he said, "Hi Angel. Everything all right?"

"Of course, Michael. I told you, everything is as quiet as — Well, maybe I'd better not say it this time."

Jessica was watching him with interest. She had heard his greeting to Lucy and the tenderness in it. Shayne decided that it might be better not to look at her while he was talking to Lucy. There was just a trace of mocking laughter in her eyes.

"Will you be coming over tonight, Michael?"

"No, Angel, 'fraid not. I'm still looking into some of the angles, trying to find some new leads."

"Well, be careful."

"Always, Angel." For a moment, thoughts of the case intruded into his mind again. "I'll let you know the minute something breaks."

"Just so it's not your head, Michael. Good night."

Shayne said good night and hung up. Jessica smiled at him and said dryly, "The, ah, angles of the case?"

"I need a drink," Shayne growled.

He made one for her, too, and



left it with her while he showered and shaved rapidly. Then they left the apartment, and Shayne was not at all surprised to discover that his arm was linked with hers as they walked.

They crossed the Bay and had dinner at an excellent seafood restaurant on the beach. Shayne enjoyed the food and the company immensely, despite the fact that the threat to his life and the mystery of Bowman's presence in the case kept creeping into the back of his mind.

Jessica sat close to him in the front seat of the Buick as they drove away from the restaurant, and he could feel the warmth of her body.

She told him how to get to her apartment, and Shayne knew that she would invite him up for a nightcap, if not more. Well, he'd take the nightcap — but that would be the extent of it.

The apartment was on the third floor, and a self-service elevator carried them up. Shayne was a little surprised when Jessica gave him the key and stood back for him to open the door.

He swung it open, put out an arm, and said with an air of mock gallantry. "After you."

And then somebody in the apartment grabbed his arm, jerked him inside, and slugged him in the back of the head.

Shayne just had time to say, "Oh, hell . . ." before the floor came up and hit him in the face.

## VIII

AS SOON AS HE WOKE UP, Shayne realized that he had only been out for a moment. The room was still in darkness. He rolled over and came up onto his hands and knees, shaking his head and trying to dislodge some of the cobwebs from it.

"You bastard!" someone snarled and kicked him in the side.

Shayne went down again, but some of his strength was returning. This time he came up with a bull-like roar and made it all the way to his feet. The lights snapped on.

Shayne recognized the face glaring at him immediately, even though he had never seen the man in person before. Frank Drago was standing in the middle of the room, breathing heavily, his broad face flushed with hate and rage.

Behind him was a smaller, dark-faced man whom Shayne recognized as Harry Eversole. Just inside the door stood Jessica Chambers, looking pale and terrified, and a youngster who had to be Jimmy Garvin was holding her arm tightly.

"We been lookin' for you all day, Shayne," Drago growled. "Don't you ever go to your office?"

Drago seemed to be literally holding himself back, as if he wanted to savor this moment,

rather than attack immediately. There was a pistol shoved into his belt, and his fingers never strayed far from it. Shayne recognized it as his own, taken from him while he was unconscious. He knew that this was a powderkeg of a situation if there ever was one.

He said, "All right, Drago, you've got me where you want me. But how about letting Dr. Chambers there go?"

Drago laughed, and it wasn't a pretty sound. "So the little bitch can run for the cops? No way, Shayne. You're right, I've got you where I want you, and nobody's going to screw that up until you've paid for what you did to my brother."

Shayne glanced over Drago's shoulder. Eversole and Garvin both looked nervous. It was obvious who their leader was, but that didn't mean they had to like everything that he had them doing. Shayne knew that his best bet might be to stall for time, to drag the thing out and make it wear even more on their nerves.

"How did you find us?" he asked slowly. "How did you know to wait for us here?"

Drago smiled. "We been watchin' your office and your apartment off and on all day, hopin' you'd show up one place or the other. We saw you go to your apartment with Dr. Chambers, but it was still light then, and there were too many people around. "So we came here." The

smile became a leer. "We knew you and that hot pants lady shrink would wind up back here."

Shayne shot a glance at Jessica. Her face had already drained of all color when they had been captured. Now the muscles in her jaw seemed to tighten even more.

Arguing with Drago would be futile, Shayne knew, but it might rattle Eversole and Garvin so that he would have a chance to make some kind of play. He said, "It wasn't my fault that your brother was running drugs, Drago. And it wasn't my fault that he got killed in prison. Besides, I was working with the cops on that case. Are you going to kill the whole Miami PD?"

Drago got a glittery look in his eyes. "I might try," he said. "I might just try."

"Like you took a shot at me earlier?" Shayne asked suddenly. "You'll have to do better than that. You killed the wrong guy. You killed Bowman's man!"

There was no mistaking the look of bafflement that appeared on Drago's face. The mental patient growled, "I don't know what you're talkin' about, but stop tryin' to confuse me. Nothing's going to stop you from gettin' what you deserve!"

That told Shayne what he wanted to know. Drago and the other two had had nothing to do with the earlier attack. That meant

that Bowman himself had to be behind it.

That knowledge wouldn't do Shayne any good unless he could turn the tables here, though.

"All right, Shayne!" Drago snapped. "Enough talkin'. You got some sufferin' to do!"

He took the gun from his belt and handed it to Eversole. "Don't mix in unless you have to," he said.

"Right, Frank," Eversole replied. Shayne realized that that was the first thing either of the other two had said.

Drago turned back to Shayne and balled his fists. "I'm gonna kill you with my bare hands, Shayne. What do you think about that?"

"I think you're full of it," Shayne answered calmly. "Why don't you come on and try, big man?"

With an enraged bellow, Drago sprang at Shayne. The big detective ducked the wild punch and exploded a right cross into Drago's jaw. The man went floundering backwards and bumped heavily into Eversole.

Shayne's ploy had worked. He lunged forward, taking advantage of the moment when Drago's body shielded him from the line of fire. Crashing into Drago, he pounded short, hard punches to the man's belly.

Eversole danced away, looking for an opportunity to use the gun without hitting Drago. Shayne

pressed the attack, peppering Drago with as many punches as he could throw.

He spared a split-second for a glance in Jessica's direction. Jimmy Garvin was still holding her, but he looked just about as scared as she did. Shayne didn't think Garvin would be much trouble if he could dispose of Drago and Eversole.

Drago's initial surge of angry foolishness had worn off by now, though, and he was fighting back, blocking some of Shayne's punches and throwing some of his own. A potent left slipped through and smashed into Shayne's solar plexus, rocking him.

Eversole was bouncing up and down slightly, asking, "Do I shoot him, Frank, do I shoot him?" Drago just grunted and parried a right from Shayne.

Jimmy Garvin only had eyes for the fight now, having forgotten that his job was to watch Jessica. Despite her fright, she tested his grip on her arm gingerly and found that she could pull loose easily. Her eyes darted toward a desk a few feet away as Shayne and Drago traded blows.

Suddenly, she jerked out of Garvin's grasp and made a dive for the desk, clawing at the center drawer. She came up with a small pistol as Garvin yelled, "Hey! Don't!" He leaped after her.

The flat crack of the gun wasn't loud, but it froze all action in the

room. Garvin stared down aghast at the little hole in his chest that was just starting to leak crimson. The others stared at it, too.

But only for a second. Shayne's fist lashed out and slammed into Drago's face. Shayne heard a satisfying crunch as Drago's nose pulped. Then he was leaping past the big patient and knocking the gun in Eversole's hand aside. He drove a knobby fist into Eversole's stomach, and the smaller man doubled over. The gun clattered to the floor.

Drago ignored Shayne for the moment and plunged toward Jessica. She screamed and triggered the gun again, but this time the bullet went wild. He plucked the little pistol from her fingers and spun toward Shayne.

Shayne went to the floor in a dive, bowling over Eversole in the process and making a grab for the fallen gun. Drago fired, the bullet ripped a gash in the carpet beside Shayne's shoulder. Shayne kept rolling until he was behind the scant cover of a sofa.

Garvin had been swaying slightly, and now he folded up in a heap. Drago leaped over his body and yelled, "let's go!" to Eversole. He grabbed the other man's arm and jerked him to his feet. The door of the apartment was only a few feet away, and they sprinted toward it.

Shayne snapped a shot at the fleeing pair and saw Eversole stagger, his hand going to his

side. But Drago still had his grip on Eversole's arm, and he pulled him along. They plunged through the door.

Shayne was on his feet and after them. He ran into the hall and leveled his gun, only to find that several of the other tenants had come out into the hall also, seeking the source of the commotion. Drago and Eversole were effectively shielded by them, and the hall was full of pandemonium.

Shayne was just about to go after them when he heard Jessica call out, "Mike!" He turned back into the room to find her standing over Garvin's body, white-faced. She looked from Garvin to him and then choked, "I — I've killed him!"

Remembering Jimmy Garvin's mother and the promise he had made to her, Shayne felt a sharp pang of regret. Such thoughts would have to wait until later, though; there was no time for them now.

He knelt beside Garvin. There wasn't much blood on the boy's shirt, but that didn't mean anything. Shayne picked up his wrist and found a faint pulse.

"He's not dead yet," Shayne gritted. Jessica put her hands to her mouth and stood there trembling.

"Listen, Garvin," Shayne said urgently. "Drago got you into this. Does he have a hideout somewhere around here? Tell me where to find him, and I'll make

sure he doesn't get away. Tell me where to find him!"

Garvin's eyes opened and his mouth began to move, but the sounds that came out were incoherent. Shayne looked up at Jessica and mouthed, *Call an ambulance.*

Several of the horrified tenants were looking through the open door, watching as Jimmy Garvin struggled to speak. Finally, he croaked in a voice so low that Shayne could barely hear it, "Farmhouse . . . west of here . . . off Highway 41 . . ."

Garvin gasped out the directions as Shayne listened intently. The redhead demanded, "Are you sure that's where they'll go?"

"Don't let . . . him hurt anybody . . . else. Have to go back there . . . Left it there, have to get it . . ."

"Left what there?"

"Frank said . . . it was important. Got to get it . . ."

And then Shayne looked up at Jessica and said flatly, "Forget the ambulance. He's gone."

"What — what was he talking about?" Jessica asked.

"I don't know," Shayne replied grimly. "But I'm going to find out."

"You're not going out there? Surely you're going to call the police."

"I'll call the cops later. Drago put this on a personal basis right from the start, and that's the way I'm going to keep it."

"But that's crazy, Mike —"

She broke off when she saw the icy determination in his eyes. She took a deep breath and said, "I'm going with you, then."

"The hell you are."

"Those are my patients, Mike. I've already killed one of them, and I owe it to the others to try to keep anyone else from getting hurt. Maybe . . . maybe I can talk to them, persuade them to give themselves up."

Standing around arguing was wasting time. Shayne said abruptly, "All right, as long as you do what I tell you. Now let's go."

She glanced at Garvin again and said, "I'll be right with you, but right now . . . I think I'm going to be sick!"

She sprinted for the bedroom and the bathroom beyond.

Shayne shooed the curious bystanders away. They were muttering about calling the police, which was all right with him. It would save him from having to explain to the cops why he wouldn't be there when they arrived.

He was just about to slip out and leave Jessica when she emerged from the bedroom with more color in her face and said, "I'm ready."

Shayne was ready too, ready to get this case over with. There was still the matter of Bowman's involvement to clear up. He took Jessica's arm and growled, "Let's hope nobody else dies tonight."

## IX

THE PLEASANT WEATHER of the day had continued on into the night, and Miami was alive and kicking. Traffic was heavy enough to slow them down somewhat, and Shayne chafed at the delay. They made their way out into the fringes of town eventually, though, and then he was able to increase the speed of the Buick.

"This has all been so horrible," Jessica said. "I've never . . . never even fired that gun before. I only got it when there was a rash of burglaries in the neighborhood."

"Well, it's a good thing it was there," Shayne grunted. "Drago would have enjoyed killing both of us."

"What do you think is so important that Drago would have to go back for it?"

Shayne shook his head. "I don't know, but it must be something pretty big." He tugged momentarily at his earlobe and thought about what Garvin had said. This mysterious prize of Drago's could be the answer to Victor Bowman's interest in the case. A package of drugs, maybe? It didn't take a very big bundle of uncut stuff to be worth a fortune.

They had left Miami behind now, and were cutting through an area of coastal farmland that was low and flat on both sides of the road. Traffic had thinned out to next to nothing, of which Shayne

was glad. He pressed down on the accelerator and soon had the Buick pushing ninety.

Jimmy Garvin had told him where to turn off of the highway. He found the dirt road, almost passing it in the dark, and turned up it. The abandoned farmhouse that had served the three escapees as a hideout was a mile off the highway.

Shayne had his window down to let the cool night air wash over his face, and he heard the gunshots before he saw the muzzle flashes. He hit the brakes.

"What is it?" Jessica asked.

"Sounds like a battle going on up there," Shayne grunted. He had cut the lights as soon as he turned off the highway, driving by the light of the moon and stars, and now as he peered through the windshield, he could see a light in the farmhouse. Judging by the flashes going off all around it, the place was surrounded and under siege. Could the cops have found out about it and arrived already?

No, if that was the case, he would have seen the flashing lights of the patrol cars. This was someone else attacking Drago and Eversole . . . Like Victor Bowman?

Shayne snapped the bulb out of the Buick's dome light and opened his door. "Somebody beat us to it," he said in a low voice. Reaching under the dash, he found the microphone of the

radio-telephone and handed it to Jessica. "Now you can call the cops."

"What are you going to do?"

"Slip up there and see what's happening. I think somebody else wants what Drago's got, and I want to find out why."

She clutched his brawny arm. "Be careful, Mike," she said huskily. He was a little surprised that she didn't put up an argument. "I just press this button and talk into the microphone?"

"Right. And stay here after you call the cops."

He slipped out of the car and began padding down the dirt road. His gun was clutched in his hand, and his eyes were searching the darkness ahead.

He was within a few hundred yards of the old farmhouse when several dark figures suddenly rushed the shack, firing rapidly. Return fire came from the house, but most of them went determinedly on. Shayne crouched and watched the battle intently.

One of the attackers made it onto the porch and slammed into the door, knocking it open. A shot came from inside immediately, driving him back, but others took his place, pouring into the house and firing wildly. Shayne estimated that at least twenty men were in on the attack.

Odds like that made for a short battle. After a moment of firing and frenzied yelling from inside the farmhouse, a silence that

reeked of death fell over the place. Shayne moved closer.

He was in the yard of the house now, and he moved stealthily from tree to tree, trying to get close enough to see what was going on. As far as he knew, all the attackers were in the house now. He sprinted across the last stretch of open ground and crouched beneath an open window next to the porch.

A voice that he didn't recognize snapped, "Spread out and find it! That's what we're here for." Judging by the tone of command in the voice, Shayne suspected that it belonged to Victor Bowman.

He raised his head warily until he could see over the sill of the window. It was Bowman, all right, and he was standing over the crumpled, bullet-riddled bodies of Drago and Eversole. Frank Drago would never get his twisted revenge now, and Harry Eversole wouldn't have to worry about what his wife was doing and who she was doing it with.

As Shayne watched, one of Bowman's men came hurrying into the room, holding something in his hand. He gave it to Bowman, and Shayne could see that it was a file folder, much like the ones that he had gone through at the Sanitarium. This one was thick, full of papers, and Bowman flipped through them quickly.

"This is it, all right," he said sharply. "It's damn lucky Drago



still had it. This could have ruined everything."

"What are you going to do with it, boss?"

Bowman's face and tone were vicious as he answered, "I'm going to take it back to Brenham and make him eat it. The stupid bastard never should have written it all down, anyway."

Outside, Shayne frowned. What the hell did Brenham have to do with a hood like Bowman? It was suddenly very important to Shayne that he get a look at that file.

He wouldn't get the chance now, though. A flashlight suddenly snapped on, pinning him in its beam, and a voice yelled, "Hey! There's a guy out here!"

Shayne cursed and dove out of the light. He sent a shot buzzing in the direction of the flashlight wielder and headed for the shadows at the end of the house.

Something ran into him in the dark, something that cursed back and slammed a fist into his face. Hands grabbed him from behind, and Shayne drove an elbow backwards into a stomach. He lashed out with his gun hand and felt the barrel rake across something that was a face, judging by the yell of pain.

There were more men surrounding him now. Shayne knew it would do no good to fire. There were more of them than he had bullets. He tore out of a clawing grasp and turned toward the house. A showdown with Bowman

was his only chance.

He vaulted onto the porch and made for the door. It opened before he got there, and he could see Bowman standing inside. Shayne snapped his gun up, hoping to take the gang leader hostage, but before he could fire or even say anything, something slammed into the back of his head. It still ached from being hit by Drago earlier in the night, and now the blow sent skyrockets exploding through his head. The porch tilted crazily and he felt himself falling.

The rough wood planks scraped his face as he landed. He tried to keep from losing consciousness, thinking that surely the cops that Jessica summoned would be here soon. Then feet surrounded him, and he felt himself being turned over.

Bowman loomed over him, a sneer on his sleek face. He said, "Hell, Shayne, you just don't know when to quit, do you? We didn't have any gripe with you; you should have let us handle Drago."

Shayne felt his senses slipping away. Still, he was fully aware of who it was that came running up and peered over Bowman's shoulder at him.

Jessica...

His mouth tried to form her name, and Bowman laughed. "No, she didn't call the cops, Shayne. And since you probably saw and heard too much here,

tonight, I guess you're just going to have to go with us. Bring him along."

He felt hands lifting him and carrying him, but the last thing he was aware of before he slipped into a black, inky pool was the look on Jessica's face. Her eyes were staring at him...

And her eyes were cold. Cold and hard...

## X

WHITENESS WAS ALL AROUND him when he woke.

The walls, the floor, the ceiling were all white and cold and sterile. And there was something wrapped around him, something that was holding his arms in an uncomfortable position.

He blinked his eyes, tried to speak, and a very familiar voice said, "Lie still, Mike."

Lie still was all he could do. There was something wrong with his head. His eyes couldn't quite focus. But he could see well enough to recognize Jessica Chambers as she bent over him and looked into his eyes.

"The drug is still holding," she said.

"Good," another voice answered. More figures moved into Shayne's field of view.

There was Bowman, slick and grinning evilly. And there was the bearded form of Dr. Eric Brenham, looking worried. Shayne

shook his head slowly from side to side.

He was at the Sanitarium, he realized. They had given him some kind of drug. It made it hard to speak, hard to think. He had been with Jessica...

And then Jessica had been with Bowman. With startling clarity, it all came back to him, and his brain started to make connections, even in its numbed state.

"The... file..." he managed to croak.

"Yeah, the file," Bowman said. "If you hadn't found out about that, Shayne, we might have been able to let you go. I've heard about you, though. You're a real bulldog of a shamus. You wouldn't have let up until you found out what was in that file now, would you? Well, I'll save you the trouble; I'll tell you."

"Do you think that's wise?" Brenham asked hurriedly.

Bowman shrugged. "What's it going to hurt? He's not going anywhere, and after a few days of your treatments, he won't even be able to tell anybody his name, let alone anything about the scam we've got going here."

Jessica moved away out of Shayne's vision as Bowman stepped closer and bent over the detective, who realized now that he was in a straitjacket.

"Listen, Shayne, if you want to hear what this is all about. When Drago and his pals busted out of here, they stole some cash from

the doc's office, but they lifted something else that was worth a hell of a lot more. They may not have known it at the time, but that file they took along with them contained all the details of a little business arrangement that Brenham and I have. He gets his rich, swanky patients hooked on the junk that I supply. Then they have to pay us for the dope and also to keep it quiet about them being junkies. We've got a couple of dozen pigeons so far, and it's a sweet racket, Shayne."

It was a vicious racket, one of the worst that Shayne had ever heard of, and he would have to do something about it . . . if only his muscles would work, which they wouldn't. He felt like a plate of spaghetti.

"When Drago figured out what he had," Bowman went on, "he called Brenham and told him to cough up enough money to finance a trip out of the country once he had wasted you. Drago wouldn't just take the money and give up his revenge on you, though, and that's what got him killed in the end."

"You . . . followed me," Shayne managed.

"That's right. We had to find Drago, too, so we could get that file back, and we decided to let you do most of the work. You were the bait for Drago. We had Jessica keep an eye on you this afternoon, and then we got a lucky break when she heard Garvin tell you

where the hideout was."

The drug must have been starting to wear off. Shayne could feel a little bit of sensation oozing back into his muscles. It was a little easier for his larynx to function as he said, "She must have . . . called you . . ."

"Bowman laughed. "That's right. She pretended to be sick and called me on her bedroom extension. We hustled right out to the farmhouse, took care of Drago and Eversole, and then you showed up."

Jessica reappeared, her face grim but composed. She said, "I wanted to keep you out of it at the end, Mike, so you wouldn't find out about the file, but you insisted on going to the farmhouse. I really liked you, too."

"You like me and that good old money better, though, don't you?" Bowman said, sliding an arm around her waist. "Well, you can forget about Shayne now, babe. Everybody can forget about Shayne."

Taking a deep breath to further clear his head, Shayne tested his bindings. The straitjacket was snug and held him almost completely immobile. He could tell now that he was lying on a hard bunk of some kind, and he asked, "Where am I?"

"This is an isolation room," Brenham answered. "We put patients here when they become violent. The ward right outside is where we keep the highly

disturbed patients, the ones who might become dangerous."

Shayne knew that the only reason Bowman had explained about the file was that he didn't expect Shayne to be around for long. He said, "So now you kill me, right?"

"No," Brenham said sharply. "I won't allow any killing in my hospital. I'm going to inject you again, and you'll just go back to sleep. After a few more injections, you won't be any danger to us."

Shayne's blood ran cold in his veins. They were going to turn him into a vegetable, destroy his mind with drugs. Somehow, that scared him more than a simple death threat would have.

"There's no reason we can't keep you here," Brenham went on. "You'll just be another patient. We'll fix up some spurious documents to give you another identity and furnish a reason for you being here."

Shayne knew that wouldn't last long. Sooner or later, they would kill him.

Brenham moved closer, a hypodermic syringe in his hand. He said, "This won't hurt, Mr. Shayne. Just relax and go where it takes you."

"Hurry it up," Bowman snapped. "I've got things to do. We've got to keep an eye on that secretary of his. If she starts poking around in her boss's disappearance, well, she can vanish just as easily as the great Mike Shayne."

*Lucy!* She knew enough about the case that she would never rest until she found out what happened to Shayne. And Bowman wouldn't hesitate to do to her what he had in mind for Shayne.

The thought of it sent white-hot rage coursing through him. His teeth clenched together as Brenham came closer. The bearded doctor bent over him and said, "I'll have to loosen the jacket to give him this injection. He's still groggy enough that he won't be dangerous, though."

Shayne tried to lie as limply as possible. If that's what Brenham wanted to think, then let him. They hadn't reckoned on Shayne's recuperative powers, aided by his fury over the threat to Lucy.

Brenham rolled him over on his side and loosened several of the fasteners that held Shayne's arms. He started to pull the fabric of the jacket down to reach Shayne's upper arm.

That's when Mike Shayne exploded.

His big foot lashed out, catching Brenham in the stomach and driving him backwards. The doctor let out a howl and fell into Bowman. Shayne rolled off the bunk and surged to his feet, trying desperately to pull his arms free.

Bowman cursed and pulled a pistol from a shoulder holster. Shayne ducked his head and launched himself into a dive, ramming into the gangster and bouncing him off the wall. The pistol went spinning away, but

Shayne couldn't get to it.

Jessica was the only one between him and the door now. He sprang at her, still trying to pull his arm free of the sleeves of the jacket. One of them suddenly came loose as she grabbed at him, trying to slow him down for Bowman. His fingers clamped down on her arm and swung her out of the way.

A gun cracked.

Jessica slumped against him with a strangled cry. Shayne jerked his head around. Bowman had recovered his gun and fired just as Shayne threw Jessica out of the way. The bullet meant for him had torn into her side.

Bowman screamed, "No!" His eyes went a little insane as Jessica slid down to the floor to lie still, her lifeblood pumping out onto the cold tile.

The mobster's finger contracted on the trigger frenziedly, sending slugs zipping through the air around Shayne. Shayne slammed into the door, popping it open. He half-fell, half-ran out into the ward on the other side of the door.

His head was spinning from the effects of the drug and the exertion he had just gone through, but he knew he couldn't pause to recover his strength. He broke into an uneven run down the length of the ward.

There were beds on each side of him, and the occupants were sitting up and staring wildly at

him. Shayne tore the straitjacket the rest of the way off and dropped it as he ran. The ward was dimly lit, but the patients could see what he had just done. It was a gesture that identified him as one of their own, in their minds.

These were the potentially violent patients, but they had not yet been strapped into their beds for the night. Several of them, alarmed by the confusion that had suddenly invaded their home, leaped from their beds to confront Shayne and babble incoherent questions.

He tried to dodge around them. There were guards at the far end of the ward that he hadn't seen earlier. They probably knew nothing about the scheme that Bowman and the doctor had cooked up, but they would still be a danger. Brenham could claim that Shayne was an escaping patient.

Brenham came staggering out of the isolation room and did just that, shouting, "Stop that man! Guards! Stop him!"

The guards saw a wild-eyed man rushing down the ward toward them and came to the only logical conclusion. They plunged into the melee, and in a moment, Shayne was in the midst of a churning, heaving group of patients and guards.

The crush was just about to bear him down when Bowman burst out of the isolation room,

still insanely angry, and opened fire.

A guard cried out in pain and fell out of the struggling knot. The other guards stopped fighting and looked down at the wounded body of their comrade. They suddenly realized that all was not as it had seemed moments earlier.

The patients were still in an uproar, though. Shayne tore himself out of the grip of one of them as Bowman ran down the ward toward him, still firing wildly. Panic swept through the patients now, and it was all the guards could do to preserve their own skins.

Shayne ducked under some flailing arms and came face to face with Bowman. One of the redhead's big hands swept the gun aside and the other crashed into Bowman's jaw. The drug dealer went staggering backwards and bumped into one of the patients, who promptly grabbed him in a spasm of confusion and fear. The ward was filled with shrieks and groans and shouts. Shayne saw Bowman struggling, which only made his captor hold on tighter, and then Brenham was also fighting his way through the crowd. The thick file folder was under his arm.

Shayne pushed his way through the mob as several of the guards broke away and went for more help. Brenham was trying to get away through the crowd. Shayne caught up with him, grabbed the

white coat and spun the doctor around. One hand plucked the file away while the other hooked a short punch to Brenham's belly. The crush of the frenzied patients separated them before Shayne could throw another punch.

Shayne felt like he was swimming in a human tide, and his head was getting lighter and lighter. He knew he might pass out at any moment, and in this mob, he could easily be trampled to death. His feet bumped against something and he looked down.

Victor Bowman lay at his feet, body broken and bruised. Shayne didn't know whether he was dead or alive, and at the moment, he didn't care.

The volume of the shouting went up, and more people poured into the room. But these were guards, and Shayne even saw some blue-uniformed police among them. He started to fall, and then a strong hand caught him and held him up. A cop stared into his face and yelled, "Mr. Shayne! Is that you? Are you okay?"

Shayne shouted a reply, but he never knew what he said. The cop pulled him to one side, out of some of the danger, as the guards and the police began to restore a semblance of order. Interns moved among the patients rapidly, administering injections, and within ten minutes, relative peace reigned over the ward again. Shayne took a deep breath and

surveyed the carnage.

Bowman was dead, crushed by the many frantic feet once he had slipped to the floor. Brenham was nursing an arm that looked broken. And Jessica Chambers was still in the isolation room, struck down fatally by Bowman's bullet. Shayne shook his head grimly, even though the motion made him dizzy.

The file was still gripped tightly in his hand. He held it out to the cop who was in charge and said, "You'd better get Will Gentry over here to straighten this mess out. There's some dead men in the country west of here, too. This file ties it all together. Now, if you don't mind, I've got something important to do."

He passed out cold, but they caught him before he hit the floor.

swered the knock on her door a couple of hours later, it was a haggard Michael Shayne who stood there. He said, "Hello, Angel."

"Michael! What happened? Are you all right? Come in here!"

He walked in slowly, and Lucy went on, "No offense, Michael, but you look awful. It's after midnight; I think you should be home in bed."

"I should be in a hospital, to hear some people tell it," Shayne said, "but somehow, I just don't trust the places right now."

For the first time, she noticed the thing that dangled from his right hand, and she asked, "What's that? You'd better sit down before you fall down."

Shayne's rugged face creased into a grin. "It's a straitjacket," he said. "Kind of a souvenir."

And then he sat down and told her all about it.

WHEN LUCY HAMILTON an-

Next month Mike Shayne returns in

**MURDER IN PARADISE**  
by Brett Halliday

Don't miss it!



# The Basics of Murder

by STEPHEN MERTZ

There was a flurry of activity along the firing line, where an officer lay sprawled, a little cloud of dust puffing around him. Army fatigues were rushing, trying to help. But it was obvious the man was dead!

FORT CURRY IS SPRAWLED across ten square miles of the southeastern portion of the state; the second largest US Army Basic Training installation west of the mississippi.

I acknowledged the MP's smart salute with a nod and asked for directions to the onbase housing area. Then I got another salute and eased the car through the front gates, onto the base.

The day was cool, clear and breezy with the first chill of Fall in the air. I followed the exit curve off of the main artery and the road became two-lane and

pleasant. It was only a mile-and-a-half drive, but it was slow going at times.

Twice I had to stop for a company of men as they marched across the road before me, shouldering their rifles, their formation somewhat ragged, their NCO's counting cadence and snarling at every misstep. Another time I had to pull over to make way for the big rigs transporting trainees out to the firing ranges beyond the living and headquarters area.

I had to smile. I hadn't been on an Army base since my last ro-

tation back from Nam in '69. It was a funny feeling, and it got me thinking some more about Abe Morales.

- Abe and I had been through two tours of duty together in Vietnam. We had saved each other's life more than once. Army life, especially in combat, can forge strong bonds of friendship between men, and it had been that way with us. We hadn't seen an awful lot of each other but we had stayed in touch over the years. The last time I had seen Abe had been two years ago at his wedding.

As a matter of fact, it was Abe's wife who had reached me by phone late last night and had asked me to come down here today. I'd left the city early that morning, it had been a long, hard drive. But it had paid off. It was only two-thirty in the afternoon, and there I was.

Tarawa Hills looked like any middleclass suburb outside of any American city you might care to name. The prefab houses followed two basic designs. The streets were winding and sedate. The lawns were well-manicured, dotted with children. A suburban dream or a suburban nightmare, depending on how you looked at it.

I found Number 16, Avenue C easily enough. Abe's home was the ranch-style model, white with brown trim.

I had left the car and just stepped onto the front porch when the screen door was opened by a slender Chicano woman in her mid-to-late twenties.

Her face brightened with a dazzling smile as she reached out and touched her hand to mind. Her fingers were warm to the touch.

"O'Dair, it's good to see you. I'm glad you came."

She called me by my last name, the way everyone does. She had picked that up from Abe.

"Hello, Maria. I had to come. You said it was urgent."

We had only met once before, when she and Abe had gotten married. I had liked her then and I liked her now.

Maria Morales was as lovely as her name. She was of classical Spanish beauty, all smooth lines and glowing, vibrant features.

I followed her into the house. You couldn't tell that the decor had been furnished on an enlisted man's pay. There was a feeling of comfort and security here. Maria had given her man a good home.

But she was uptight about something. It was a nervous energy that crackled just beneath the surface, barely noticeable. An undercurrent of tension that I didn't remember from our last meeting.

"You've had a long drive. Let me fix you a snack and something to drink," she offered.

I had to admit that a beer and sandwich sounded good.

In the clean, modern kitchen, she set a beer down before me. Then while she prepared — and I devoured — a thick roast beef sandwich, we did our talking.

"I need you to stop something that's going to happen," she said. Her eyes and voice were deadly serious. "Abe and one of the officers in his company are running on a sure collision course."

"How serious is it?"

"Very. It's over me. The officer is a macho creep named Lieutenant Braun. I think the name went to his head."

"How did Abe find out about him — and what was there to find?"

"There was nothing to find," she said. "I may be as bored as any other Army Post wife, but I'm not *that* bored. The Lieutenant isn't exactly my type. I've tried to give him the idea, but he won't take no for an answer. He comes on to me when he sees me at the PX. He offers me rides whenever he passes me on base. That sort of thing. It was really starting to bug me, and Abe could see that something was wrong. I had to tell him about it."

"Things have changed since I was in," I told her. "I don't remember officers being quite so friendly with enlisted men's wives."

"Things have changed," she agreed. "This is peace time Army,

and most of the time things are pretty lax around here. But the Inspector General is coming through on an inspection tour tomorrow, and right now the whole base is like a pressure cooker. Abe has a reputation of always having the sharpest outfit in the Command, and there's a lot of pressure on him to do it again this year, all the way from the base commander on down."

"I see what you mean," I said.

"It's the wrong time for trouble on the domestic front."

"There wouldn't be any trouble if Abe wasn't such a proud fool," she said. Maria's hands were clasped before her on the kitchen table. She was one step away from wringing them. Her lips were drawn tight with tension. "And that damn fool Lieutenant. He's on some cheap power trip. He seems to be pushing Abe, using the IG as a pretense. I don't know why. Maybe there isn't a reason. But Abe is like a timebomb getting ready to explode, and it keeps getting worse by the day. I know that man. I can feel it building. And when he does explode, he and Lieutenant Braun are going to clash. O'Dair, I'm afraid something terrible is going to happen."

I knew her man, too. Probably better than she did, in some ways. I'd seen him in the heat of combat; a side no woman would ever see. For sure, I knew what she was talking about. Abelardo

Morales was a good, honest, strongly-principled guy with the deep-running pride of his race. And the hot blood.

"And you want me to defuse the timebomb, is that it?"

She nodded. "He's told me all about what the two of you have been through; what good friends you are. Even with the IG coming up, your being here would take off a lot of the pressure; he'd be so happy to see you. I hate to use this kind of subterfuge, but I've tried talking to him about it and he just evades me. With you here, he'll have some time to cool off and think things over. Maybe you could talk to him. I don't know. Whatever you think is best. I'm worried."

"Where is Abe now?"

She glanced at a wall clock. "Let's see. It's three o'clock. He'll be with his company out at the rifle range. They've been drilling the men day and night with the inspection coming up."

I felt my mouth pull in that same nostalgic grin as when I'd seen those ragged trainees over on the highway. Or maybe it wasn't nostalgia. I certainly had no interest whatsoever in turning back the clock.

"I remember the days and nights before an IG all too well." I nodded. "Abe must have his hands full. Maybe we should wait until he comes home."

But she was already standing and clearing away the plate and

glass from behind me.

"Nonsense. You're one of Abe's best friends. I'd never hear the end of it if he thought I'd kept the two of you from seeing each other. Let's go see him now."

There is a certain tone of voice which ladies can get that you simply don't argue with.

"Okay, Maria. Let's go see him."

She paused as we were leaving the kitchen.

"O'Dair, there's just one more thing I have to say. I really owe you my thanks for coming down and helping like this..."

"So pay me back tonight with one of those home cooked mexican dinners Abe wrote me about," I told her. "Right now, let's take that drive."

IT WAS TEN MINUTES to the range. I did the driving while Maria and I passed most of the ride with idle talk, mostly about things that had happened since they'd been married. Abe had made First Sergeant, which was something he hadn't written me about. But Abe making top kick of his outfit didn't surprise me. Determination, healthy ambition and good soldiering — and a good woman at his side — had seen him a long way since our days together in the jungle...

The ride out to the range was like a pleasant drive through the country. But any illusions that this was really just a lazy afternoon

spin were shattered as we left the blacktop and followed the stretch of gravel leading toward the Training Area.

The sound of so many weapons being fired simultaneously was at first only a dull popping in the open air. But the popping grew louder as I pulled into the gravelled parking square and braked to a stop amid two huge personnel transport rigs and an Army sedan. We were heading toward a grassy knoll a few yards away. The gunfire was very loud now, and a battle could have been raging just the other side of that slope, except that the reports thundered with the marshalled cadence of target practice.

Then we were looking down on the range stretched out before us. Lengthwise, approximately 150 raw recruits were laying prone along a line of about 300 yards, taking aim and snapping off shots at distant targets. Each of the riflemen had a firing partner; another basic trainee who crouched alongside him, waiting for his turn to fire. An NCO or junior officer stood about every twenty men or so, yelling here, giving a direction there, above the constant crackling of weapons. Keep your head up. Squeeze the trigger, don't jerk it. Come on, you sad sack trainees. That's the enemy out there! At our end of the line an observation tower rose high in the air sprouting loudspeakers from which the "Fire"

and "Cease Fire" orders were given.

A cluster of men stood at the base of the tower, observing the exercise. Abe didn't see us. He had other things on his mind.

One of the men, a general, began speaking, and everyone else in the cluster listened. Then there was a lot of saluting and the general, a corporal who must have been his driver, and a satisfied-looking captain turned and walked past us back toward the parking area. It must have been their Army sedan we had seen, and my guess was that the general was camp commander. The captain was probably Abe's skipper. This was the pressure Maria had been talking about; they were getting heavy on Abe's case with the inspection coming up. The captain had brought the general around to show off his outfit — and probably Abe, as well.

Military games. They weren't missed, either.

After the general's party was gone, Abe gave a signal to someone up in the observation tower, and the order blared out from the loudspeakers, over and over, to cease firing.

When the last reports had died away, Abe walked over to stare down at his men. He was a muscular, in-shape guy, and standing there with his feet planted firmly apart and his hands on his hips he radiated self-confidence and demanded respect like a picture

off an Army sign-up poster.

"General Aucott was very pleased," he told the men. His voice registered some praise but lost none of its stern military bearing. "He thinks we'll do just fine when the IG comes through tomorrow. Is he right?"

The roar of voices raised in simultaneous response echoed across the range.

**"YES, SERGEANT!!!"**

"I can't hear you!" Abe shouted at them. "Are we going to pass that inspection? Are we going to be the best damn outfit in this man's army?"

**"YES, SERGEANT!!!"**

**"I still can't hear you!"**

**"YES SERGEANT!!!!!"**

"That's better. All right, we'll run through this exercise one more time. If your officers and platoon sergeants are satisfied, you'll get a ten minute break before the ride back. Now get to it!"

There was a brief pause. Then "Begin Firing" issued from the loudspeakers and the crackle of rifle fire resumed. So did the barking of the NCO's and junior officers along the line.

Maria and I were approaching Abe now. There was a whole staff of people monitoring the action on the range, and it finally looked as if he had a moment to spare.

He sensed us coming and gave a cursory glance over his shoulder, then did an almost comic double take when he saw who it was.

When his eyes centered on me, the military bearing split into a wide infectious grin that was every bit as Spanish as his hot blood.

"O'Dair! What the hell are you doing here, man?" The voice carried a laugh, both surprised and glad. He came forward with that restraint of open emotion so common among his race. But when we shook hands his grip was firm and welcoming. "It's good to see you, buddy."

"It's good to see you too, Abe. I finished up some business south of here and I'm on my way home. Thought I'd stop in and say hello."

"I've already twisted his arm into staying over with us," Maria chimed in.

"If that's all right with you, Sarge," I said to Abe. "Now don't go polite on me. I know there's an IG coming up. If I'd be in the way —"

"Knock it off," said Abe. "The brass around here are driving me nuts, so I will be on the run for awhile until the damn thing blows over. Guess you'll have to stick around for a few days more than you'd planned, amigo."

I started to say that we'd see, but that's when I was cut off by the sudden squawking that erupted from the loudspeaker system, cutting through the incessant drone of rifles.

**"Cease fire! CEASE FIRE!!!!"**

There are combat instincts that a fighting man never loses, and

they spun Abe around now even before the last weapon had ceased its chatter.

I didn't have to turn. Maria and I were already facing the range. And right now my eyes were focusing in on the flurry of activity at about midpoint along the firing line.

A man lay sprawled on his back. A little cloud of dust was puffing up around him, showing that he'd just landed. All about him was a hubbub of frantic activity. Army fatigues were rushing and kneeling, trying to help. But even from here, you could tell that the man was dead. He lay perfectly still, staring up at the sky.

Abe's voice was a choked whisper that I hardly recognized.

"Oh, my God," he said. "They've hit Lieutenant Braun."

## II

DINNER THAT NIGHT at the Morales home was a subdued affair, to say the least. The food itself was excellent. Maria's enchiladas and refried beans were everything I had been led to expect. But there was a strained undercurrent around the table, lurking just beneath the desultory conversation that the three of us tried to keep going.

The undercurrent was both explainable and unavoidable.

First Lieutenant Michael Braun had been dead when he hit the ground. He'd caught a round

right through the chest.

*And no one had admitted firing the shot.*

Abe had been tied up most of the night. The MP's had moved in swiftly and methodically. All trainees were confined to their barracks, and Abe had left word to be notified the moment anything broke.

It was past eleven when we finished dinner. During the meal, no one had mentioned the shooting. But as Maria was clearing away the dishes, the frustration I'd sensed in Abe suddenly burst to the surface. I couldn't remember having seen him this uptight.

"Damn! How could it have happened? He was completely clear of their line of fire. He —"

Maria set down the dishes and stepped around behind his chair. She touched him, her fingers massaging his shoulders, her voice soothing.

"Abe, it happens, accidents like that. No one can explain them. Remember Sergeant Miflow last year?"

Abe rose sharply. He crossed the room and faced away from us, as if addressing the opposite wall.

"Miflow was a damned fool. An old, senile fool. Lieutenant Braun was a punk lieutenant, but he was no fool. He knew his way around a range." He slammed a fist angrily, nosily, into an open palm. "Dammit, how could it have happened?"



There was silence. Maria's eyes met mine, briefly but meaningfully, beseechingly, from across the table.

"Let's take a walk, Abe," I suggested. "We need some fresh air. Both of us. Let's give the lady a break."

"I can't, O'Dair." Abe turned. He'd calmed down some but the tension was still there. "What if they call from the Company? What if someone confesses?"

It's times like that when a good woman will show her colors. Maria crossed over to her husband and her arms went around his wide shoulders.

"Abe, O'Dair is right. You need to get out and unwind. You know how a walk always helps you relax. Don't go far. If there's a call, I'll come and get you."

Another silence. Then Abe smiled, leaned forward and kissed his wife.

"See what I've got to cope with, O'Dair? A woman who won't stop taking care of me, whether I like it or not."

"You don't like it, you love it," she chided him affectionately. "Now do what I tell you and make yourself scarce. You two have probably got a ton of old Army stories to swap and even after two years of living with a GI, there are probably still some words these innocent ears shouldn't hear."

"I think the lady means bus-

iness, Abe," I said. "Let's go."

We walked awhile, heading around the block, alone with our thoughts. The night was cool and clear.

"She's a good woman, Abe."

Abe nodded. "The best. Sometimes I have trouble believing she's mine."

"You owe it to her not to worry yourself sick about this thing."

He acted as if he hadn't heard me. "I just can't understand what happened out there today. And the bit about no one coming forward —"

"It was one of your recruits," I said. "It was unfortunate but it's bound to happen once in awhile with that many novices firing that many weapons all at once. Some E-1 is sitting over in one of those barracks right now, scared out of his wits, and any moment he's going to break wide open."

Abe shook his head as we walked. "I'd like to think you were right, buddy. But I'll tell you something just between the two of us. Lieutenant Braun was a first-class bastard. There wasn't a thing about him that I liked, and I know damn well that a lot of other people felt the same way."

"What are you saying, Abe?"

"I'm saying this. You remember what happened in Nam when there were punk OCS wonders that no one could stand? A lot of them got fragged. Blown away by their own troops. I'm just wondering if that's what happened on

the range today."

"Abe, it was an accident. Those kids work on teams. One lies flat and fires, the other is next to him, giving him tips and policing up the brass. Every so often they switch. So one team was switching and someone's rifle went off. Bang, one dead lieutenant. An accident. Maybe the guilty party doesn't even realize he did it."

But he still wasn't listening. "I want you to look into it, amigo. That's your business, right, looking into things? Do that for me, will you? Investigate Lieutenant Braun. Look into his past. See if there's anyone who might have had it in for him bad enough to want to snuff him out."

"Abe, that's reaching."

"It's not reaching. The man is dead. Maybe it was an accident, maybe it wasn't. But I've got to know for sure. That's my outfit we're talking about. A mark like this could follow me around for years. I've got to have a hand in finding out what happened to that little jerk. I know you work for a living like everyone else. I'll pay you to find out."

"You don't have to pay me, Abe. I'll do it."

He accepted that. "All I want is for you to look into it," he said. "Quick like. No big deal. I trust your capabilities. Look over his place in town; I'll give you the address. Just nose around. I'll probably be up and gone before you get up tomorrow — there's

still the damn inspection. If you haven't come up with anything by tomorrow night, I'll accept that it was an accident, and we'll let things take their course. I just want to see if you learn anything."

"Okay, Abe," I said. I'll look into it."

By then we were back at the house.

NOT ONLY WAS ABE GONE the following morning when I woke up, but Maria had disappeared as well. A note on the kitchen table in feminine script said that she had gone shopping and invited me to help myself to anything in the fridge; that they'd see me again tonight.

I made myself some eggs and bacon and while I sat and devoured them, I did some thinking.

I'd come to Fort Curry to try and help straighten out a friend's domestic problem, and here I was up to my ears once more in sudden death. I was a working detective again even if it was for friendship this time instead of money. But that made it all the more imperative that I do a thorough, satisfactory job, and I had wanted to begin my detecting by asking some questions close to the source.

I couldn't ask too much of Abe without revealing the fact that Maria had sent for me, and I couldn't discuss much about it with her in front of Abe for the same reason. So I'd been looking

forward to a talk with her that morning.

I don't like coincidences, but when she and I had been alone the night before, waiting for Abe to return from the barracks, it hadn't occurred to me that Braun's death might be anything than what it had seemed: a tragic accident. Perhaps not so tragic to Maria's way of thinking, considering all the hassle Braun had been causing her. Not tragic to Abe, either, for the same reason. But a coincidence nonetheless.

Only now things had changed. Talking with Maria was important. She might know something, some little tidbit, about Lieutenant Braun without actually knowing that she knew it, if you can follow that, and the right questions, asked at the right time in the right way, can do a lot.

I'm not exactly an early riser but it was still only 8:15. Pretty early for shopping, and that started me wondering. I wondered if I was being avoided by the lady of the house. And if so, why.

Then I stopped wondering. I felt a pang of guilt over sitting at someone's table, eating their food and wondering if they were trying to avoid me. The questions could wait.

I finished breakfast, cleaned up the dishes and drove into town.

Leesburg is an army town located three miles down the highway from the base, with a population of about ten thousand.

Like most such army burgs out in the middle of nowhere, it's small and tough looking in a tacky kind of way, beginning with the massage parlors and adult bookstores on the outskirts and ending up with the taverns, laundromats and secondhand shops in the middle of town.

There must be some upstanding citizens in Leesburg who aren't simply out to rip off the servicemen, and if there are they probably live on the quiet, treelined street where I found the address that Abe had given me last night: the tastefully conservative, four-unit red-brick apartment house where Lieutenant Braun had lived.

I had just opened the front glass door and was stepping into the building's entrance foyer when a big man in his mid-fifties brushed by. He seemed to be in a hurry to get out. He was dressed in civvies, but the closely shaven crewcut, with more salt than pepper to it, tabbed him as a military man. He was wide shouldered, in damn good shape for his years, and I had to step aside or be knocked over as he brushed by without so much as a by-your-leave. Military arrogance, I'd call it.

The glass door closed after him and I watched as he walked briskly to a low sportscar at the curb, climbed in and drove off. He was just turning a corner up the block and disappearing out of sight before my memory bank clicked

and I placed where I had seen him before.

The man was General Aucott, the commander of Fort Curry. I had seen him briefly the day before at the firing range when he had come out to inspect Abe's troops — just before Lt. Michael Braun had received a fatal round in the chest. Well, well.

I filed that away for future reference and continued up to Apartment C where Lt. Braun had made his home. The door was unlocked, which was unusual, and I entered without being seen. It was a modern bachelor-oriented unit with an orderly cleanliness about it that reflected Braun's barracks days.

I locked the door behind me, noticing the lock as I did so. It was a simple commercial model, widely sold. The kind that would be child's play to open for anyone with a laminated ID card or even a butter knife. Or maybe General Aucott had a key. Or maybe he hadn't even come here to elicit himself into the late lieutenant's living quarters. But I didn't think so.

Like I said, I don't like coincidences.

I gave the place a quick but professional going over, and one thing became apparent before I even made it out of the bedroom:

Someone had beat me to the punch.

Drawers had been reclosed, things had been put back in their

place, but all very sloppily; probably hurriedly. The disorganization in the closets and dressers didn't at all mesh with overall cleanliness of the place.

But whoever it was hadn't found what they were looking for. I knew that for two reasons. I knew it because the search didn't end at any one spot — the intruder hadn't stopped looking until he'd become frustrated — and I knew it because I found what he was probably looking for.

It was wrapped in a plastic baggy taped to the curved underside of the bathroom sink. A cassette tape with no identifying markings other than those of the manufacturer.

I slipped the tape into my pocket, let myself out of the apartment, locked the door behind me and drove back to the base. No one saw me leave, either.

A dead lieutenant. A lurking general. A cassette tape.

Things were getting very interesting.

### III

THE MAN IN CHARGE of the MP investigation of Braun's death was a major named Dawson, a short, wide-set career man in his late forties with deep, tired eyes and thinning brown hair.

I took the chair he offered me facing his desk and explained who I was and that my friend Abe Morales had asked me to look into

yesterday's shooting. Dawson took it all in, and he didn't get huffy at all about a civilian meddling in what was his job, the way he might have. He tapped some tobacco into a blackened briar, fired it and spoke between puffs.

"I appreciate your coming by O'Dair. This whole thing happened at a hulluva time, what with the Inspector General coming through today. He sailed through my office this morning; they're touring the whole base. Something like this not only looks bad, but it's harder than hell to get anything done until we get some breathing room."

"Anything turn up yet?"

Dawson nodded, puffed a bit more, then, "It broke this morning. Your friend Morales hasn't told you yet?"

It was a conversational question, but those deep eyes weren't as tired as they had first appeared. They were watching me closely. Major Dawson would have been right at home on any big city police force.

"I've been on the run all morning," I told him. "Asking questions around town."

"Learn anything?"

"Not yet. Now it looks like I won't have to if you've already got the thing solved."

"Not solved exactly." He glanced down at one of the form reports on his desk. "AN E-1 named Torres." Then, looking back up at me, "He went over the

hill last night. AWOL. The local authorities are pitching in. There's an APB out for him. He won't get far."

"That's not much proof that he shot the Lieutenant."

"There's more. When he didn't show up for morning formation, we started putting the screws on the kid who was his firing partner out on the range yesterday. Kid named Rivas. It took awhile. They were buddies before they enlisted together and Rivas didn't want to rat on his compadre."

"So what does Rivas say now?"

"That Torres shot the Lieutenant. It happened while they were changing positions on the firing lane. Rivas lays Torres swore that his rifle went off by accident, about that he was afraid he'd be railroaded because of his race."

"Do you buy that?"

"About being railroaded? No, but I might if I was a scared kid who had just killed an officer." He leaned forward and tapped his pipe out noisily into a glass ashtray on his desk. "I'm afraid that kind of draws a knot in your investigation, wouldn't you say, Mr. O'Dair?"

"I guess it does. Which is fine with me. I came here to visit Abe and his wife, not play detective." Then I reached into my picket and brought out the cassette tape that I'd found in Braun's apartment. "I do have a favor to ask," I said. "My office sent this down for me to listen to. Something to

do with a court appearance I have to make next week for a client. Any chance of me finding a tape player around here that I could listen to it on?"

Dawson rose and walked me to the door. His manner was cordial. If he was still interested in me, he was keeping it under wraps.

"I don't see why not. Ask the PFC out front. He'll have one, and there's a room just down the hall where you'll have some privacy."

I thanked him, got the portable tape player from the orderly and stepped down to the room which Dawson had indicated. Before playing the tape, I took a few minutes to search for bugs. There were only three wooden chairs and a table in the room — the room was probably used for interrogation; this may well have been where they had questioned the Rivas kid about Torres — and it didn't take long to search. I came up empty-handed. No hidden microphone. Then I sat down and played the tape.

I wasn't sure of my exact reasons for not telling Dawson the truth about the cassette. Maybe it had something to do with the fact that I had promised Abe that I would investigate Braun's death. Or maybe it had something to do with the fact that it looked like a general might be involved. The Army likes to take care of its own. I'm not saying that Dawson or anyone else at Fort

Curry would cover up a murder, if it had been premeditated murder. But I came of age in Vietnam. I remembered My Lai and the coverup that had followed that debacle. And My Lai wasn't an isolated case. It was simply the only case that had broken in the media. Coverups *can* happen.

Also, I was curious and I had to satisfy my curiosity for myself. If a trainee named Torres had shot Lieutenant Braun, if it was all as cut and dried as Dawson seemed to think, then what had General Aucott been doing at Braun's apartment?

Well, if the tape didn't give me that answer, it gave me enough. It gave me some answers that I hadn't even known had questions. And then some.

The tape which Michael Braun had secreted under his bathroom sink was pure, undiluted dynamite.

The fidelity was mumbled and distant. The tape had probably been rerecorded any number of times before Braun had managed to get his hands on it. But although you had to strain your ears to listen, the awful, naked truth was still there in all its horror.

The voices could have been those of actors reading a script from some clichéd war drama, except that the intensity of those voices, and the screams of pain under a torturer's blade, were all too real.

A clipped foreign voice asked

questions, and when the answers weren't forthcoming, there was a brief silence while the captors went to work again and then the screams of the American would start anew, louder, more agonized than before. Until at last the whimpering American voice pleaded for mercy, half out of its mind with the fear of pain yet to come. A voice cracked with defeat. A voice crying for the torture to end, promising anything — *anything* — if they would only spare him.

And then the sought after information had tumbled out, almost in a babble: troop allocations and movements, strategies, all of it, the names of places and the dates mentioned ringing in a far off time and war and place called Korea, while the name by which the North Korean captors addressed their American prisoner wasn't that far off at all. I had heard the name yesterday and had seen the man less than an hour ago.

That's right. He was a general now. The commander of a US Army basic training installation. But some twenty-five years ago he had been Captain Aucott, involved in the Korean police action, and the cassette tape before me was the closest thing to proof positive that Captain Aucott had committed that most unpardonable of all military crimes: collaboration with the enemy.

I didn't listen to all of the tape.

I flicked off the machine when I'd heard enough and leaned back. The room was cool but the back of my shirt was plastered to my body with sweat. Talk about revelations! That tape was dynamite, for sure, and the revelations were two in number. And they had both come at me out of the blue, suddenly and without warning.

One was the terrible skeleton that General Aucott had been carrying around inside his closet ever since he'd been a Korean POW. He certainly would never have risen to the rank of general had the truth that he'd broken under torture and sold out his troops ever been known. And the second revelation was every bit as damning: Lieutenant Braun had been in possession of that tape.

And Lieutenant Braun was dead.

I wondered how that fit in with a scared trainee named Torres.

I was just pocketing the tape when the door opened and Major Dawson poked his head in.

"Sorry to bother you," he said. "Thought you might like to take a run into town with me."

I stood and joined him. "Something break?"

He nodded. "Torres turned up. The local police did our job for us. He had an apartment in town. That's where we found him."

"An apartment?" Since when do basic trainees have liberty to leave base?"



"They don't. But once in a great while it'll happen if they're slick and careful enough, and Torres must have been both. The kid was a bad soldier all the way down the line, apparently. After lights out he'd fix his duffle bag in his bed, go over the hill, have his fun in his rented pad and be back in time for reveille. He fancied himself quite the ladies man, according to Rivas, and there must have been some ladies around town who felt the same way."

"You think Torres will talk?"

"I doubt it. He's dead. The police say it looks like an overdose of something, probably heroin."

**I FOLLOWED DAWSON IN.** Private Torres' assignation center was in a fleabag dump over a tavern, about three dozen notches down the social and economic ladder from where Lieutenant Braun had lived. It was a dingy, unkept apartment that smelled of age, and the bed in the center of the single room seemed to be the principle piece of furniture.

The Private had been a big, good-looking stud of a kid. He sat on the bare wood floor with his back against the bed, his legs splayed out before him, his head down on his chest and his eyes closed as if he had fallen asleep.

He had, in away. He'd fallen into the big sleep from which no one ever wakes up.

The shooting kit — spoon, candle, glass phial — was on the bedside table. A tie was still wrapped tightly around his left arm to give him a vein to shoot into and the hypodermic syringe was only inches from the fingers of his convulsed right hand.

I tagged around long enough to hear Dawson question the local men, but they didn't have much. They were still speculating with Dawson about whether it might be an accidental overdose or suicide when the ambulance men showed up. They lifted and began strapping Torres to the wheeled stretcher.

There was nothing for me here. Nothing but another dead end — and another dead body. I thanked Dawson for asking me along but he only nodded, hardly hearing me. In his line of work he must have seen a lot of GI's gone bad, but you could see from his tired eyes that it was something he'd never grow used to.

There was a pay phone on the wall of the dimly lit hallway just outside the apartment. The phone here, like the toilet, was communal. A local directory dangled from a chain beside the phone.

I decided to give Abe a call. He was probably on the run with the inspection going on. It was my guess that he hadn't even heard about the discovery of Torres' body. I had no idea what his number at the company HQ would

be, so I decided to call his home number and ask Maria.

I opened the phone book. Then I froze.

Finding Abe's number in the directory wasn't hard at all. *It had been underlined. Twice. In heavy black ink.*

#### IV

THINGS WERE BREAKING fast, almost too fast, but a pattern was starting to emerge. The picture was still fuzzy, but the fine tuning was almost in reach. All I had to do was put the pieces together in just the right way. But then, that's always the hard part...

I decided to drive out to Abe's detachment and speak to him in person. He met me in the corridor outside the orderly room, and we stepped outdoors into the sunshine. There was an air of expectancy hanging over the detachment, inside and out, and Abe was a part of it. I'd never seem him jumpy before, but then an IG can do that to the most combat-hardened veteran.

"I take it the inspection team hasn't been through yet."

He glanced at his watch. "They're due any minute. They were supposed to leave B Company at 1300."

"Then I'll be quick," I said, and I gave him the news about E-1 Torres dying from an overdose of smack. "It might have been a suicide, it might not," I finished.

"The ME will determine that. But the point is, it's almost over."

"What do you mean — almost?"

"I've got a question, Abe. I want a straight answer."

He wasn't distracted at all now. His face clouded. "What the hell are you talking about, O'Dair? I've always played straight with you."

"Then play straight now. I want to know if you had any dealings with Torres."

He was silent for a moment. He reminded me of a volcano getting ready to erupt. Only I hadn't expected the ferocity of his sudden anger.

His powerful right arm straightened and his fist lashed out. The knuckles snapped my chin back and the sound inside my head was like someone popping their palms over my ears. It caught me by surprise, full force. I went sprawling back onto the grass.

He stood over me then, glaring down, his fists still clenched, the anger coursing through him.

"Why'd you ask me that, man? Because I'm Spanish and so was Torres? Because I said a few lousy things about Braun last night and you think I might have paid Torres to waste him?"

I looked up at him and thought of why I had asked that question. I thought of what I knew that he didn't know I knew. He had every reason to hate Braun, and possibly want him dead, since Braun was

hassling his wife. It was a question I'd had to ask, friend or no friend. But I still owed something to Maria. Why I was here originally was her secret, and I would keep it for her.

"Relax, Abe. You're under pressure."

"You're damn right I'm under pressure," he rasped. "I'd expect a question like that, but not from you. That damn junkie Torres put a black mark against every Spanish man on this base. We're a minority, dammit. When a brother pulls something like that, we all pay. He was in my company, sure. But I didn't have *anything* to do with him except that I was his First Sergeant. Anyone who says different is a damn liar."

I started to my feet. "You don't understand, Abe."

"I understand plenty. It's just that I thought you were my friend, O'Dair. I won't make that mistake again."

He turned and stalked back into the headquarters building without looking back.

Like I said, an IG can make anyone jumpy.

GENERAL AUCOTT was surrounded by members of his staff in the hallway outside his office when I approached him. The place was a beehive of activity. Phones ringing. Uniforms scurrying here and there. Inspection day had everyone busy.

I waited until the activity around

him had cleared and he was alone for a moment.

"I'd like to have a few words with you, General."

He glanced up. I was just another fact in a busy day. "Afraid I can't take the time right now. There's —"

"Yes, I know. The inspection. But I think we should talk. I have something you want. A tape. Lieutenant Braun's tape."

There was a long pause. Suddenly I was more than just a face. I seemed to be dropping all kinds of emotional bombs today.

"Very well," he said at last. "This way."

I followed him into his office. The decor was military and all business, with pictures of generals and presidents and framed citations in places of prominence all over the walls.

The General locked the door, then went over to sit behind his desk. He brought out his checkbook and reached for a pen.

"How much do you want?" he asked simply. His voice was as matter-of-fact as his manner. That same military arrogance. An SOB.

"You're an awfully trusting soul, General. You don't even know my name."

"Does it matter? I assume you'll turn over the tape if I pay you. And I assume that you have it. I've got a good memory for faces. I didn't recognize you a moment ago because of everything that's

going on. But you were at Braun's this morning. We almost bumped into each other."

I reached into my jacket pocket and drew out the cassette. I tossed it over and it landed on the polished top of his desk with a plastic sound.

"It was under the sink," I said. "Easy, if you knew where to look. Is it for real?"

He was a big man but he seemed to shrink behind his desk when I asked him that. He sighed as if he hadn't had any rest in a long, long time.

"Yes, it's for real. I don't know how Braun got hold of it. His family was rich. Money can buy a lot of things in a military academy."

"He was putting the squeeze on you?"

"Of course. He had ambition, that boy. He thought that tape could take him a long way on this post. Maybe he was right. Too bad he got blown away."

"Yeah, I've been meaning to ask you about that," I said. "That was pretty convenient for you, his getting killed like that. All you had to do was go over to his place this morning, retrieve the tape, and you were in the clear. The MP's have hung the kill on a kid named Torres. They found him dead this morning in town from an overdose of heroin."

The bastard did his best to drum up a bit of sarcasm. "What a shame. Good riddance to bad

trash. But what does that have to do with me?"

"It might have a lot to do with you if this tape were turned over to the MP's." I picked up the cassette and looked at it as if it were suddenly very interesting. "Some people might think that you arranged to have Torres kill Braun to get the Lieutenant off your back. They might also think that you killed Torres and made it look like a suicide to keep him from talking."

"That's preposterous. I'm the commander of this post —"

"No one commands the MP's," I reminded him. I slipped the tape back into my pocket and started to turn. "We'll see what Major Dawson has to say about it."

"Wait!" There was just the edge of panic in his voice and it made me turn. He was standing beside his desk now, and the panic was real. "I'll pay you. I'll pay you anything you want."

"I've never blackmailed anyone before," I said. "What's the going rate these days?"

"For that tape — anything you want. That tape would ruin me. Everything I've got would be lost. Please, you've got to let me have it. Name your price." His words now carried the same pleading, almost whining, quality that I'd heard on the tape. It sounded strange, coming from a man in a general's uniform. "H-how does thirty thousand dollars sound? Probably more than you

make in a year. I've got holdings. I could —"

But I was shaking my head.

"Forget it, General. I was just curious. The tape isn't for sale. It's going to Dawson. And if he can tie you to the Braun and Torres kills and send you away for those too, all the better. People like you have to learn that you pay for what you do, just like everyone else — even if it takes twenty-five years."

Then I was on my way back toward the door again. Which was when he did something foolish.

"No! You can't! I won't let you —"

His scream was almost like a woman's. He had reached to his side and yanked open a desk drawer and was coming out with a heavy Army model .45, bringing it up to me. But that was as far as he got. I crossed over to him in three quick steps and when the toe of my right shoe swung out and up, it sent the .45 flying from his grasp, and the force of the kick itself piled him back to the floor against the wall like the suddenly out-of-shape bag of wind that he was.

I reached over and picked up the .45, slid out the clip and ejected the round that was still in the chamber, pocketed them with the tape, then tossed the .45 onto the carpet before him. But he hardly noticed it. His eyes were on me. He'd undergone a complete metamorphosis, from military

belligerence to a trapped, beaten animal waiting to see what the victor's next move would be.

"W-what are you going to do?"

I turned and started back across the office and this time I made it all the way. "I'll see you in court, General."

"No, wait! Please . . . don't go. Name a price. I'll pay. Let's make a bargain. Please . . . please —"

It was pathetic. He was still begging when I closed the door behind me.

I was almost out of the building when the loud shot echoed through the hallways. People started running toward the General's office. That's where the sound had come from.

The General must have had a spare round in his desk.

#### IV

IT HAD BEEN QUITE A DAY, but things were finally slowing down.

After a visit to MP Headquarters and a talk with Major Dawson, there was only a brief stopover at the Morales house to pick up my suitcase before heading for home.

The news of General Aucott's suicide had already spread across the base. But Dawson had agreed to keep me out of it in exchange for the tape that had caused all of the General's troubles. It was his business how much of the tape, if anything, he was planning to release. My part in it was done.

Abe, Maria and I were standing in their living room now, and Abe's face was drawn with emotion. It was late afternoon. C Company had passed its IG with flying colors, but that wasn't what was on Abe's mind now. I knew the guy well enough to understand that — and I wished that there were some words I could say to set his mind at ease.

He was still upset about having knocked me on my butt.

"What happened back there at the Company," he was saying. "You were right, O'Dair. I was just under pressure. I had no right to react to you the way I did. You had to cover all the angles, ask all the questions. I understand that now. I'd just hate to think that you were leaving because of what happened."

I'd told them that my answering service had called with the news that a big case was breaking in the city.

"Forget it, amigo. We've been through enough over the years that a moment of anger isn't going to change anything."

His dark eyes lost some of their intensity and I knew that we were tight again. I could see that made Maria happy, too.

"I just want to thank you for looking into the Braun thing for me," he said finally. "This was a hell of a vacation for you."

"So I'll be back for another vacation as soon as I can," I promised. "I wish I could stay

longer, but I've got to get back."

"There's just one thing I don't follow," he said. "Torres. Do you think he was an accident or a suicide?"

"My guess would be accident," I said. "He didn't sound like the suicide type. He was under a lot of pressure and for guys like that, smack is a way to deal with it. He just overdid it. But don't worry about it. No one else will."

He started to say something else, but the phone rang. Maria was nearest to it. She answered, then reached out to hand it to her husband.

"It's Captain O'Neil," she told him. "He wants to congratulate you on the inspection."

Abe stepped past me, beaming with all the pride that is any soldier's after a job well done. As he picked up the receiver to speak, I gave his shoulder a squeeze that said more between two men than any words ever could. Then I walked out the front door and down to my car.

I was just sliding in behind the wheel when Maria reached me.

"You know, don't you?" she said. "I could feel it in there. There's no big case in the city. You just want to get out."

I looked at her through the car window. "I have to get out, Maria. It's your lie. You have to live it."

"How . . . how did you find out?"

"I came across your phone

number underlined up at Torres' place. At first I thought he might have had dealings with Abe. But the way Abe said no, I believed him. So it had to be you."

She bit her lower lip to keep it from trembling. When the words came, they were low and choked, heavy with emotion that was almost a sob.

"It . . . it only happened once. I don't know why. God, how I've hated myself ever since. I felt so dirty after it happened . . . so *filthy*. And now you must hate me, too. Why didn't you tell Abe?"

I could have told her that I'd delivered enough retribution for one day. Or that there was a big difference between what she had done, and a creep who commits the cardinal military sin of selling out his own troops in battle, then continues to rise through the ranks, never bothered by the blood on his hands. But she had enough on her mind, so I kept all of that to myself.

"I don't hate you, Maria," I said. "I have too many weaknessess of my own to hate you for giving in to one of yours. As for telling Abe . . ." I shrugged. "There are some problems that I can fix for people. Other times it's best to let the problems take care of themselves."

She worried her lower lip some more and shook her head slowly from side to side. Her inner pain was a real thing that I could almost reach out and touch.

"I still don't understand what happened."

"You were bored. It can happen to an Army wife on an Army base. It can happen to a man too, for that matter. Any man, anywhere. If it only happened once, and you learned something from it, maybe it had to happen."

"I leaned a lot," she admitted. "I learned how much I love Abe and how much I want to keep that love. But . . . I don't understand what happened to Lieutenant Braun, and the rest of it."

"That one time, you must have told Torres about Braun and his advances," I said. "Torres wanted to show you what a man he was. You must have had quite an effect on him. He must have known that you loved your husband, but Braun was another matter. He wanted to kill off the competition. After it happened, he panicked. I thought for awhile that someone might have paid him to kill Braun, but now I don't think so. If Torres had any big money he would have been long gone, not laying around town shooting smack."

"Oh, my God."

"It's over, Maria. You've got a second chance and that's more than most people get. Don't blow it, okay?"

"I won't, O'Dair. Thank you."

I didn't want her thanks. I only wanted to get away.

I slipped the car into gear, and six hours later I was back in the city.



# UNHAPPY HOUR

by PAUL GLEESON

He was alone in a small town, and he wanted a drink. That wasn't too much to ask — or was it?

RICH SALZGEBER wanted a drink. He was tired, sweaty and hot. Five hours ago, at three in the afternoon, he had taken off from LaGuardia for Kansas City, where he had boarded a small Beechcraft for Killocene, Kansas (population 6,324). He had then seethed in the living-room-sized waiting room of the Miller County Municipal Airport for twenty minutes, waiting for the '73 Chevy with a pasted-on "Taxi" light to arrive.

In the Kansas night he had endured a half-hour ride over pitted, narrow county roads to Killocene. His attempts at humor had been rebuffed by the driver ("Say, did you hear the one about the doctor who . . .") "Nope, and I don't want to.") and he had quickly given up further attempts at conversation, enduring the bumps and rattles of the old car in contemplative silence.

Dropped at the Killocene Inn ("Serving the weary traveler since 1892"), Rich registered

while the clerk looked on woodenly. The wall clock showed it was 10:00. Glancing around the deserted lobby, Rich said, "Boy, it's a good thing I made a reservation. The way this joint is jumping, I might have had to sleep in the street."

The desk clerk looked sharply at Rich, then picked a key from the pigeon-holed rack behind him. He handed Rich the key with an icy stare, droning automatically, "Room 207, Mr. Salzgeber, upstairs and to your left."

Rich took the key, wondering if the cabbie and the clerk were related. "Hey," he said, "do you think the other guests in the hotel will mind if I breathe? I don't want to bother anyone, you know."

Rich had an expectant, not unfriendly, grin on his face. The desk clerk looked at him for a moment, then raised his eyebrows and turned away. *Hick!* Rich thought.

Rich started to reach out for

his suitcase, then straightened. "Hey!" he said loudly. "Where does a guy get a drink in this town?"

The clerk turned back again with a look of annoyance. "A drink, sir? You mean an alcoholic drink?"

"Hell, yes, what other kind is there?"

"It's illegal to serve liquor by the drink in Kansas."

"Well then, where do I get a bottle?"

"The state liquor store closed hours ago, sir."

"You mean I can't get a night cap in this hick town?"

The clerk looked at Rich intently for several seconds. Then, as if he had made a momentous decision, he nodded his head sharply. "Well, sir, there is the Literal Club."

"What's the Literal Club?"

"It's a private membership club in town. State law doesn't apply to private membership clubs."

"How do you join this club?"

"We have an . . . arrangement with the Club," said the clerk, choosing his words carefully. "Registered guests of the hotel can join for twenty-four hours for two dollars."

"Done!" Rich exclaimed. He fished two dollars from his pocket and gave them to the clerk, who in turn thrust at him a cheaply printed temporary membership card in the Literal Club.

With a half-smile, like a man contemplating going home to a passionate evening after his shift, the clerk gave Rich directions to the Club, which was within walking distance.

Rich asked the clerk if he could leave his suitcase at the desk, and the clerk nodded, the secret smile still on his face.

"I won't be long," Rich said.

"You just take your time," the clerk responded dreamily, "just take your time."

Shaking his head, Rich left the hotel.

As Rich followed the clerk's directions, he cursed the circumstances that had brought him to this one-horse town of humorless hicks. His company wanted to build a new plant, and one of the possible locations was this God-forsaken burg in the middle of nowhere. Killocene! It had no transportation and no worker pool, and the town was miles away from any large city. Those corporate planning fools were out of their minds! Rich had already decided that when he flew back to New York tomorrow, it would be with a negative recommendation on Killocene.

He walked to Kiowa Street, the address the clerk had given him. The red brick, two-story building was identical to the structures that adjoined it on either side, butting up to the sidewalk. Rich noted with surprise that the two windows facing the

street had been bricked up.

A doorbell was set into the wall next to the door, with a small metal plaque above it. In the soft glow from the street lamp, Rich could barely make out the letters L TERA LUB etched on the plaque. He pushed the doorbell.

The door opened almost immediately. A slender, middle-aged man of average height, wearing an open-collared white shirt and black trousers, looked at him with a blank stare. Rich asked, "Is this the Literal Club?" The man in the white shirt nodded somberly. "I, ah, have a membership card here somewhere." He fished through his pockets. He showed the card to the man, who examined it carefully. The man gave Rich a thin smile, then stepped back to let him in.

As the man closed the door and walked away, Rich surveyed his surroundings. He was in a long, narrow room, devoid of windows and lit dimly by indirect lights along the sides of the ceiling. To his right, a mahogany bar stretched the length of the room. Three men and a woman sat toward the far end of the bar, each separated from the other by at least one empty stool. At the end of the bar closest him, where it curved in to meet the richly panelled wall, the seats were empty. It was utterly silent in the room.

Rich felt an uneasy feeling growing within him. There was

something out of place here, and it wasn't just the unnatural quiet.

He moved to the curved end of the bar and took a seat next to the wall. The white-shirted man had found his way behind the bar, and now came over to Rich. He stood there on the other side of the bar, looking fixedly and without expression at a point somewhere over Rich's left shoulder.

Rich broke the silence. "Can I order a drink here?" he asked.

The man answered without looking at him. "We're a very small club, sir, in a very small town. We can't fill very order, but we'll certainly try to do our best."

"I'll have a screwdriver." The man nodded, then turned and walked the length of the bar and disappeared through a door leading off to the far right.

Rich frowned. Why would the guy have to leave the bar to make a simple drink? Rich looked around, and realized what had nagged him when he entered the club. To his right, along the wall at the back of the bar, there were three long, graduated shelves. But the shelves were empty. Normally, he knew, you would see row upon row of bottles: bourbon, rye, scotch, gin, vodka, brandy. Glasses might be discreetly hidden, beer might be safely stored in the cooler, mixers could be under the bar, but the booze

was always close at hand, in sight. Rich shrugged his shoulders. Kansas, he thought. Probably another stupid state law.

He turned to study his Club-mates. The girl was young and pretty, but looked morose. She was staring at the highly polished mahogany before her, with a look of resignation and despair. The first man down from her was smiling, looking at the wall in front of him, obviously thinking of some personal triumph that had just occurred, or was just about to happen. He was heavy, middle-aged, and dressed in a short-sleeved, open collared shirt.

The second man down was older. His face was tan and wrinkled in a way that people call "weathered." His full head of hair was totally white and spank-ingly clean. He looked fixedly ahead at the back wall of the bar, his face portraying no emotion. Rich had the feeling that the man was a regular who didn't want to be bothered.

The third man, all the way down, wore a yellow sport coat and a navy blue shirt without a tie. He was obviously lost in thought. His head bobbed up and down, his eyes seeking first the ceiling, then the bar, then the ceiling again. From time to time the man would bring his fist down on the wood slowly yet decisively, as if he had made a serious decision. He's making up his mind to leave his wife or quit his job, Rich mused,

and he needs the booze to give him courage.

Then it struck him. What booze? None of the four had a drink on the bar! The gleaming stretch of mahogany between Rich and the far wall was completely empty. For the second time, Rich frowned.

He swivelled around to look at the door through which he had entered. It was heavy wood, perhaps oak, with large brass fittings. It glistened with a soft patina in the indirect light.

"Run a bill, sir?"

Rich started. He revolved his seat back to the bar to find the white-shirted man standing there, the blank look still on his face.

"What?"

"I said, would you like to pay now or run a bill?"

"Oh, I'm sorry. Let's run a tab for awhile." The bartender turned and walked back to the far end of the bar. When Rich looked down, his head jerked. Sitting on the bar in front of him was a long, wooden-handled, metal . . . screw-driver.

He almost started to cry out to the bartender in anger. *What kind of gag is this, anyway?* Then he stopped. What the hell, he thought, at least somebody in this town had a sense of humor. He looked again at the other people along the bar. None of them had so much as glanced his way.

*Literal Club*, he thought. *Not bad*. He wondered if this was a club for aspiring comedians or an oasis for the few souls in Killo-cene who clung to a sense of humor in this corn-belt hamlet. *Well*, he thought, *let's see how good they are*. He considered for a moment, then called to the bartender.

"Is the screwdriver all right, sir?" the bartender asked.

"Oh yeah, fine. But I changed my mind. I think I'd like a Rusty Nail." With a half-smile, Rich winked at the bartender to let him know he was on to the joke.

The bartender continued to look over Rich's shoulder, his voice devoid of expression. "Coming right up, sir."

The bartender left the room and returned almost immediately with a roofing tack covered with dark orange rust. He placed it carefully on the bar in front of Rich, next to the screwdriver.

Rich chuckled smugly. *Well, my dead-pan friend*, he thought, *you've had it easy up to now. Let's up the stakes*. "Hey, when you get a chance," he said, loud enough to carry to the other members so they could appreciate it, "how about bringing me . . . let's see . . . a Manhattan. Yeah, I'll have a Manhattan."

The bartender's face took on a pained expression. "I'm sorry, sir, but as I told you before, we're a small club and we can't

fill every order. I'm sure you understand."

Rich nodded with a grin. *Gotcha!* he thought. Then he realized that he had cheated. Their little game had to have some rules, and he would have to stay within them.

"OK," he said, "then let's have a . . . grasshopper."

The bartender nodded solemnly and left again for the unseen room at the end of the bar. He returned to Salzgeber with his hands cupped together in front of him. "You'll have to be quick, sir," he said as he opened his hands in front of Rich. A large, green grasshopper jumped immediately from his hands, took two hops on the bar and leaped to the floor where it disappeared from view.

"I'm sorry, sir. I'll get you another."

"No, no, that's all right. Let me see, I think I'll have a . . . a rye."

"Straight up, or on the rocks?"

"Huh? Oh, on the rocks. Rye on the rocks."

When the bartender returned, he was carrying a small cardboard box, open at the top. Inside was a pile of stones and pebbles, topped by three long grain stalks. He placed it on the bar in front of Rich, moving the screwdriver and nail aside to make room. Rich searched his face for a sign of shared amusement, but the bartender's eyes were glazed and dull. *He's not impressed*, Rich

thought. *I haven't been challenging him. My orders must be the equivalent of Joe Miller wheezes to him.* The bartender was starting to walk back to the far end of the bar.

"Say, wait a minute," Rich called as he thought frantically. "I want another one."

The bartender looked back with disappointment in his eyes. "Another rye, sir?" he asked.

"No, no. Bring me some, ah, some wine."

"Yes, sir," the bartender replied. This time he didn't retreat to the adjoining room. He walked back and stood in front of Rich, crinkled his eyes into a sad look, opened his mouth and began a high-pitched, mournful wail. The bartender's voice rose and fell in pitch as Rich stared in disbelief. *Son-of-a-gun,* he thought, *he's whining.*

Rich looked at the other customers. Their positions and attitudes remained fixed, as if they could not hear the bartender's caterwauling, or else were used to it. The whine stopped.

"Was that enough, sir?" the bartender asked in his monotone.

"Oh, plenty," Rich answered, "very good, too." He was grinning again, but the bartender did not even hint at a smile. The white-shirted man turned away again. *Damn,* Rich thought, *I'm really boring him.*

"Bartender," he cried quickly, "what would you suggest?"

The bartender came back to Rich. There was a faint sign of interest in his face, and his eyes looked thoughtful as he stared over Rich's shoulder. "You might try our champagne, sir."

*Champagne,* Rich mused. *What can he do with champagne?* "OK," he said, "I'll have some champagne."

The bartender clenched his arms around his stomach and doubled over, emitting rough grunts and groans. He continued for close to a minute, mimicking the throes of a severe stomach ache. Then he straightened and resumed his poker face, as if nothing had happened.

"Was that to your satisfaction, sir?"

Rich burst out with a hearty guffaw. *Sham pain,* he thought. That was damn good. The bartender retained his stolid composure.

His eyes tearing from laughter, Rich asked the bartender if he could recommend anything else.

"Don't you think you've had enough, sir?" the bartender asked.

"What? Oh hell no. I'm not driving." Rich gave out another burst of laughter, which was not returned.

He thought another thought. He looked down at the young girl with the sad face. He flushed as he said in a low voice, "What

about an Angel's Kiss?"

The bartender frowned and turned his glance to where Rich was looking. He looked back to Rich with a baleful stare. "Now really, sir," he said.

"I asked for an Angel's Kiss. Are you going to fill the order or not?"

The man shrugged in resignation and called gently down the bar. "Mary," he said, "the gentleman has ordered an Angel's Kiss. Could you . . . ?"

The girl with the sad eyes got off her stool and walked slowly over to Rich. She was beautiful, he thought, but her eyes — so sad.

Wordlessly, she leaned forward and placed a soft, gentle kiss on Rich's cheek with lips of warm velvet. Rich could feel his face turning red as she returned to her seat just as silently as she had come. *That had been a cheap shot*, he told himself. *You should be ashamed of yourself, Salzgeber.*

The bartender remained in front of him, his face a cold mask. In his eyes, Rich thought he read a mixture of disgust, dislike and disapproval. *What the hell*, he thought, *it was their game in the first place.*

The bartender turned and walked to the far end of the bar. Rich decided it was time to go. The episode with the girl had dampened his humor, and the game now seemed silly and stale. *What was worse*, he told himself,

*he still hadn't had a drink.*

The man in the white shirt came back to Rich, his right hand behind his back. The bartender's face had some animation this time, Rich thought, as he prepared to ask for his bill. There was a hint of a smile at the corners of the bartender's mouth.

The bartender was standing in front of him, looking directly into his eyes for the first time. "One of the customers has ordered for you," he said. "It's on him," jerking his head sideways and to the rear.

*What now*, Rich thought. "What, ah, what did he order for me?"

"A Mai Tai, sir."

"Mai Tai?"

"Yes sir," the bartender replied, as he quickly brought his left hand up and leaned across the bar to Rich. He grabbed Rich's necktie and pulled it taut. The large pair of pointed sewing shears in the bartender's right hand darted up and forward, and neatly clipped Rich's tie off just below the knot.

Rich looked down incredulously at the striped fabric in the bartender's hand. "My tie," he mumbled, "my tie."

"Yes sir, that's what the gentleman ordered for you."

"What the hell do you think you're doing?" he shouted. "That tie cost me eighteen bucks!



What kind of a joke do you call that?"

"I'm sorry, sir, but the gentleman down the bar ordered it for you, and as I told you, we try to fill all orders."

Rich lurched off the stool, which fell to the floor behind him with a loud crash. "Damn it," he yelled, "I've got a good mind to call the cops. You'd better make good on that eighteen bucks, and right now!"

Without saying a word, the bartender walked to the far end of the bar again. Rich stood motionless, his breath coming in short, heavy bursts.

The bartender exchanged words with the white-haired man, and they both looked down at Rich. Something in their intent gazes made Rich uncomfortable, and he backed away from the bar as the bartender again proceeded towards him.

"The other gentleman has placed an order for you, sir."

He kept backing away further, beads of perspiration forming on his forehead. "I don't want anything else. I don't want anything else."

"I'm sorry, sir, but I'll have to fill the order."

Rolling his eyes, Rich turned and stumbled to the large oak door. He fumbled with the brass knob, his sweaty palms sliding on its smooth, round surface. The knob wouldn't turn. He grasped the knob with both hands and

tugged at it. It remained motionless.

Rich whirled to look at the bar. The bartender had come from behind the bar and was standing behind the girl, who was still staring at the polished mahogany surface in front of her. The bartender had the long, pointed shears in his right hand, which he raised above his head.

"No! No!" Rich screamed. "For God's sake, don't!"

The bartender brought the scissors down hard into the young girl's back. He pulled out the shears and thrust them in again, and again, working with quiet, passionless efficiency as her dark red blood sprayed his white shirt.

Rich screamed.

The girl slowly toppled off the stool and crumpled into a heap on the floor. She had not made a sound while she was being murdered.

Rich leaned weakly against the door, nausea welling up from his bowels. The bartender turned to face him, still standing by the girl's stool.

"The Bloody Mary is on this gentleman here," he called. The white-haired man stared blankly at Rich and slowly, almost imperceptibly, nodded his head in acknowledgement.

"You . . . you're . . . you're all crazy!" Rich cried. "I've got to get out of here!"

He turned back to the door

and desperately clawed at its heavy panelling. He heaved himself at the door again and again. His shoulder ached, but the door wouldn't budge. He dropped to his knees and searched for a lock or latch. *How in the hell could they lock it*, he thought, as his hands groped in vain for a snap-lock.

He was vaguely aware of someone approaching him from behind, but his panic forced him to continue searching for a way to open the door. Sweat was pouring over his whole body as he twisted again at the unyielding knob, grunting and sobbing with mounting hysteria.

He was still on his knees when the cold, clammy hands encircled

his neck and began to tighten. A sickening stench of rot and decay filled his nostrils and a cloak of damp, fetid air enfolded his body. He fought desperately for breath as the incredibly strong fingers clenched inexorably tighter around his windpipe.

Rich's face was starting to turn blue. His eyes bulged in their sockets and his vision began to darken and blur. He felt consciousness draining from his brain. He ceased to struggle. As he sank into red-tinged, comatose darkness, he could hear the bartender calling to him from what seemed like miles away.

"This one is on the house, sir. We thought you'd enjoy our . . . Zombie." ●

Major Lansing of the CID faces death in

**THE REAPER'S SCYTHE**  
by W.L. Fieldhouse

Don't miss the June MSMM!

# THE IDES OF APRIL

by EDWARD D. HOCH

The timing had to be just right. The rebel forces must strike when the army was on maneuvers. It was a good plan, one that could not fail.

NOW IT HAPPENED THAT in the country of Andolova there was a faction which had long opposed the benevolent dictatorship of Micah Ypres. Up in the hills surrounding Andolova City, the enemies of the Ypres regime drilled and trained for the day when they would sweep down through the trees with guns and gasoline bombs to begin the new day of freedom and

justice.

But there was in Andolova City one factor more than any other which kept the would-be rebels in their place — a small but modern army equipped with the latest American foreign aid tanks and commanded by the loyal General Petrock. The general was well able to cope with anything the rebels might offer, and he often boasted at

formal dinner parties that he would shoot them down in the streets to save the country for the Ypres government.

The secret leader of the rebel cause was a bearded, white-haired professor of Greek and Roman history at the university. Some in the government were convinced that Professor Few had Communist leanings, but whatever his politics, the Ypres forces knew him to be their enemy. It was Professor Few who lectured the peasants on the evils of the dictatorship, and it was Professor Few who commanded the small group of men responsible for training the rebel forces in the hills.

They had only one ally in the inner councils of the Ypres government, but he was an important one. Doming Veter was Andolova's Chief of Staff, the only man below Micah Ypres himself who could command the activities of the small army. Veter waited, along with the other rebels, through the long, hard winter when the only word from Professor Few was a promising, "Wait until spring."

One night in early March, Veter and professor Few met secretly at a deserted handball court in an Andolova suburb. There were no chairs, and Veter paced the concrete floor with hands clasped behind his back as Professor Few stroked his beard and outlined the plan for revolution.

"I will send you the word," he told Veter, "when the date is decided upon. It will be dangerous for

us to meet again."

Veter was quick to agree. "In the spring, it should be. I still decide the date of spring maneuvers, and when I get your message I will make certain the troops are out of the city on maneuvers when the blow falls."

Professor Few smiled through the whiteness of his beard. "With the troops away, we will occupy the city in hours. But there is something else — something important that must guide my choice of a date."

"The banks."

The professor nodded, standing very still in the center of the handball court. "Our revolution needs money — the money in those banks. The banks themselves will fall into our hands quite easily, but I do not want to spend a month blasting open vaults and safe deposit boxes. We must strike at a time when the bank officials will be at their posts, when keys and combinations will be most available."

"Not at night, or on the weekend, when they would be scattered to the suburbs."

"Exactly," Professor Few said. "The time will be in the morning, perhaps ten o' clock. I will send you the date."

"And I will order the troops on maneuvers. Let me know in plenty of time. A last-minute order might be suspicious to General Petrock."

They shook hands one last time. "When we meet again, the rebel government will be in command. The army will not fight once Ypres

and the capital are in our hands."

Veter walked through the lightly falling snow to his car. It was not too long to wait till spring.

**DURING THE NEXT FEW** weeks, Doming Veter was busy with the routines of office. He had little time to devote to thoughts of the future, but the knowledge of what was to come never was far from the surface of his mind. He was polite to Ypres, and business-like with General Petrock, but he smiled his secret smile whenever he left their company, knowing how short a time they had to live.

With the coming of spring, Andolova took on the air of beauty which was its hallmark. Veter was content merely to stroll along the byways of the city, viewing the life of it with a detached eye. If the people seemed happy to that eye, he could rightly argue that life under the rule of himself and Professor Few would make them even more so.

One day General Petrock visited his office to inquire about the spring maneuvers, but Veter was able to put him off. "I'll phone you next week," he said. Already the general was making plans to slip the army out of the city by night, so any watching rebels could not detect when the place was left unguarded. The general was a wise man in military ways, but he was making one tragic mistake. He was trusting Doming Veter.

Early the following week, a package arrived in Veter's office from the university. He unwrapped it carefully and stared down at the uncovered book. It was a slim college volume of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. This was the message from Professor Few, the expert in Greek and Roman history, but what did it mean? He closed the door of his office and began slowly turning the pages.

He found what he wanted quite quickly — in Act I, Scene II. *SOOTHSAYER. Beware the ides of March.* Only March had been crossed out, and the firm hand of Professor Few had written in *April* above the line.

The ides of April.

Veter picked up the telephone and asked for General Petrock. "General? It's decided. The spring maneuvers will take place on April 15th. That's a week from next Wednesday. You'll move out before dawn, as planned."

**THE TIME WAS NEAR.** All during the remaining week, Veter could feel his tension growing. He was at the window every time one of the big army tanks lumbered by, and he watched the activities of General Petrock more closely than ever. Saturday came, and Sunday. The weather was warm for the 12th of April, and he picnicked in the country with a girl he knew. They spoke of many things, but not of his

wife. She would go with the Ypres government. She was too much a part of the old order, the dictatorship.

Monday was the 13th, and it dawned quietly. The army was never much in evidence on a Monday morning, perhaps because of too much weekend relaxation by the troops. Veter arrived early at his office, and if any thought crossed his mind it was only that just 48 hours remained until the rebels swept down from the hills and took the city without a struggle. He wondered what Ypres would do, and he tried to imagine the dictator's face when the final blow fell.

Just two more days.

The ides of April.

Behind him, the great glass window suddenly shattered. There was a burst of gunfire from somewhere below, and the sound of a woman's scream. She ran to the window, terrified.

There were rebels in the streets — now — two days early! Something had gone terribly wrong.

He had time for no other thought before the first of General Petrock's tanks lumbered into view and started firing into the charging rebel ranks.

**GENERAL PETROCK HIMSELF** came to his home later that day to make the arrest. He was solemn and polite, but the two men behind him kept their machine pistols drawn.

"Under arrest?" Veter repeated, trying to bluff it to the end. "Are you mad, General?"

"It is a direct order from Micah Ypres," he said, speaking the name like a prayer. "The revolt has been crushed and Professor Few taken into custody. He has named the leaders, including yourself."

"The fool!"

The general nodded. "A wise fool, the worst kind. He told about the message to you, in the copy of *Julius Caesar*. The revolt was planned for the ides of April, and you were to have the army away on maneuvers then."

Veter felt himself shrink with defeat. There was no way out, not any more. "Why did they attack two days early? Did he tell you that?"

General Petrock allowed himself to smile. "They were not early. Professor Few's only error was in being too close to Roman history. He thought everyone knew. He thought you at least would know."

"Know what?"

"In the Roman calendar, the ides was the eighth day after the nones. The ides of Caesar's March was the 15th, but the ides of April and most other months was the 13th. Today."

"And he thought I knew," Veter said, staring into space at something he would never see.

The general shuffled his feet impatiently. "Get your coat, if you'd like. We have a firing squad waiting out at the handball court."

# The Hunger of Deputy Ed Harker

by JOHN C. CARR

Harker opened his mouth and smiled and began to eat. It was one of the nastiest things I've ever seen in my life!

THE COURTHOUSE of Greene County, six hundred prosperous alluvial square miles of Mississippi Delta, sits in a big park hiding behind magnolia trees, as well it might. The seat of county government, such as it is, is a Romanesque Revival monster disfigured by Second Empire orts and warts and looks at a distance like a clump of brown popsicles glued together.

The thick walls have been smudged by years of green oak pollen and scoured and cracked by

the endless cycles of torrential rain followed by broiling sun, nasty wet winters climaxed by splitting frost, and dry hot summers that seem to make powder of the stone and brick. But the prayers and cries of prisoners have affected them a bit.

I parked my car in the nameless narrow asphalt alley between the courthouse and the jail, under one of the obligatory huge magnolias, put a card bearing one red word PRESS under the windshield wiper and started for the back



door to go up and see the sheriff.

But a coffle of blacks in tattered clothes was ahead of me: handcuffed and joined at their belts by a length of white clothesline, walking single file under the shotguns of trustees picked to guard them and who served the sentence of any man who escaped. A deputy sheriff in khaki held the great oak back door open and the chief criminal deputy, James Earl Williams, stood at the end of the line, leaning on the metal gatepost, eyes as cold and dirty as the fence. The bailiffs looked down from the second-storey jury room, smoking, cold eyes on the prisoners. Jail delivery day. Arraignments proceeding upstairs.

But without Sheriff Ed, who was in his office. He sat in a small, plush office already air-conditioned, through a door in the back of the regular office, the one crowded with splintering wooden desks, peeling US Navy battleship gray surplus filing cabinets, wallmaps dusty and fading and cracked showing the boundary lines of the county's plantations (no small farms here), beats and incorporated places, railroad lines, including the famous Yellow Dog, and, on the west, the great sinuous massive curves of the Mississippi River. Which had brought constant change if not constant prosperity to the county since before the Choctaws gave it away — not that they regretted it; it was just a swamp then.

Sheriff Ed was signing papers which allowed him to auction off land in arrears of taxes from the north steps of the courthouse Saturday at high noon. Nearby were three writs of replevin to be dated, filed, logged and served, not necessarily in that order; the box holding the previous day's take from the sale of license tags and the collection of ad valorem taxes for the previous quarter.

Sheriff Ed was a Republican, the first white one and the only one ever freely elected by the entire franchise. All of which excludes the white carpetbagger and the black Radical Republican who ruled the county during reconstruction, when Mississippi was the Wild West of the Old South.

Sheriff Ed looked up, smiling brightly, reddish hair cut short, the smell of Old Spice wafting across the Persian carpet, nice black and white pinstriped suit freshly cleaned and pressed. He had a gun, of course. It was on the table behind him. But he would probably have shot his foot off it he'd tried to pop a casual cap. His main concern was that part of his constitutional title the electors Out in the County (everywhere except the blessed precincts of Ithaca) and the Yankee press seemed to ignore: "*... and Tax Collectors.*" Sheriff Ed was for Good Government. Crime was nasty. The jail smelled bad. Nobody over there but pecker-

woods and burrheads.

"Tom! Good to see you. Somebody finally shoot your boss? Heh, heh, just a joke. Mabel! Take these writs to the jail." He said the last word as if referring to the vale of Gehenna.

"I'm going over to the jail, thought I'd check to see if anything's going on?"

"My God, the *jail*? What for?"

"Ed Harker asked me to ride with him today."

At the mention of the most junior deputy he sat up a little straighter and nervously lit a Picayune, a kind of cigarette made in Louisiana for those who wish to suffer while they smoke. "Spend all your time eating moon pies and swilling RC," he mumbled.

"Beg pardon?" But I knew what he meant.

The invitation had been tendered the night before. At Chuck Iannonos' restaurant on Levee Street. It was ten p.m., I'd been in federal court until five, watching the Northern District D.A. flail away at three teen-aged car thieves, I'd watched municipal court from six to eight (highlight: the mayor throwing a snit when it was revealed to him and to a few others of us, that an escapee from the jail had smashed his getaway car into two shacks the mayor was slumlording through a third party). From eight to nine I went with the coroner to a house where a suicide had spread most of his brains across a living room wall.

About nine-thirty I was in the office writing it up and seeing that I wouldn't be finished until eleven and that Chuck's closed at ten-thirty, I knocked off for lunch and supper.

Chuck was in the back and after I'd given my order I went back there and found Deputy Ed Harker seated at a little wooden table at the end of a counter as rapturous as one about to receive the host. Chuck stood a little behind him and they watched a huge black man across the counter. He lifted a big steel pot full to the brim with water heated to a rolling boil and carried it towards them. For one insane moment, I thought the huge black man was going to baptize Deputy Ed Harker with a couple of gallons of boiling water. Steam rose around the huge black man's face, and he was sweating as his arm and shoulder muscles bulged with the effort of both lifting the pot and keeping it away from his hard round stomach. Then the huge black man poured the water into another pot, and I heard writhing and whistling and something scraping the sides of the pot, and I looked in and saw three green lobsters being burned red, but not before waving their taped claws about and writhing and whistling. It was over in a second, but it made me feel very tired. Chuck stepped forward with peppercorns, sage, thyme, bay laurel leaves, Italian seasoning, and three toes of garlic,

then watched, nodded and dropped in a lemon and two small potatoes.

Then he and his helper moved quickly and smoothly to set a spinach salad and a cruet of sweet oil in front of the deputy (his star gleaming softly in the diffused light) and then a three-bean salad, then a drink: bourbon neat in a child's orange juice glass decorated with blue giraffes.

Harker opened his mouth and smiled and began to eat. It was one of the nastiest things I've ever seen in my life. Chuck and the cook served him like to old acolytes serving a retarded bishop, then stepped back from the mess.

Harker was a skinny, sun-tanned ole boy with a blonde crewcut, the kind still fashionable in that penultimate year of the Johnson Administration, and eyes as flat and colorless as rain drops on a nickel. The bones stood out in his face as if he'd been starved into submission at an early age and every bite was a blow for freedom. He was a loner: no siblings, parents dead, grandparents back in the hills somewhere, the only son of one of those white sharecroppers who moved down into the Delta during the Depression as the blacks moved to Detroit.

He quit slobbering and sucking and looked at me. "You aint never rode with me, Engelhardt."

"Me? Yeah, I guess."

"Heard James Earl talk about you."

"All lies."

"Naw, he says you're good. Best courts reporter ever. Come on, let's *ride* tomorrow."

"Sure."

When I'd finished and was leaving, Chuck gave me an eloquent shrug, rolled his eyes heavenwards, and said, "If only my cook didn't live Out in the County and drink and pull guns in jook joints ..."

Now Sheriff Ed was looking at me in an equally pleading way. "Well, ah, Tom, nothin' goin' on here in the office ... But you're riding with Harker?"

"Sure. I rode with James Earl."

"James Earl's a *good* man."

"Well," I said.

"You come talk to me tomorrow. And keep your eyes open."

"I can't clear it with you."

"Oh I know, I know," he said quickly. "But I hear things about Harker. Not good things." Then he took a deep breath. "Maybe I oughta go back there more often ... *But* ..." He looked at me. "Just remember, I'm trying to build a scientific department. No more billyclubs and shots in the night."

"You got my vote."

"Meanwhile, this county has to be organized on a sound, business-like basis. So I'm here. They're there. And you're everywhere. I can help you."

"Everybody thinks I'm some kind of public tattletale," I said, and left.

The jail — which is the top floor of the two-storey building — was empty and the deputies and trustees had the yellow, battered, grimy building to themselves. Inside, the old wino who keeps the blotter nodded wearily and condescendingly from behind the desk, smoothing back the silvery white hair that makes him look like Francis X. Bushman or an Italian bishop or even a medieval Pope. The reek of white port followed me into the dining room, where James Earl and Deputy Ed Harker and Clarence, the frog-voiced black deputy, were having late breakfast: pancakes, peach cobbler, sausages and some of the newly-famous jailhouse coffee (they'd caught a dope runner who'd just bought ten pounds of Kilimanjaro coffee in New Orleans; they'd impounded it).

Harker was making a face at the food. The food did not seem insulted.

"Hey, what's the matter, Ed?" James Earl said, adjusting the narrow-brim straw hat he wore everywhere, even to bed with his wife rumor had it, and flashing his gold teeth at me." This not as good as the vittles and poontang they serve over at Mamma Lucy's?"

Clarence's face tried to laugh.

"Yessir, Tom," James Earl continued, "understand you're

riding with the Motorized Gourmet here today; I guess you'll like that. What with the cream pies and hush puppies and fried buffalo just caught that'll sholy come yo way today."

"Buffalo!" Clarence snorted, laughing now. "Buffalo!"

Harker ignored James Earl and Clarence, looked at me and smiled. "Well you look ready, so let's go." He got up and strapped on his gun belt.

James Earl sighed. "Must room."

The four of us went into the next room, bare except for a gray steel desk and folding chairs from one of the local funeral homes and tattered old wanted posters around a warped bulletin board. "Ed, Three and Four again, no overnight unusualls but you know Saturday when I was on patrol around Blue Lake we had to take a big ole .45 from Shehaddy, who lives on Lake Belzoni. Abe, not his brother. It was Abe this time."

"Naw, really?"

"He wanted the waitress to go outside with him and help him out while his wife was in the john, and she refused and he pulled the hogleg and the owner called us and I went in and took it away. Man didn't want trouble, so I'm just keepin' the gun a while."

"Right."

"Prowler, colored fella, on the other side of Lake Belzoni, over by the Delaval Big House. Look out for crazies on the roads. You know

about the escapees from Parchman?"

"Right."

"Ed, here's a batch of subpoenas, two writs of replevin, an eviction notice. I'm giving you because I know the tenants are gone. Nail it up. Look around on the Sampson place. Somebody's going into Archer Island and cutting off the cypress."

"I'm supposed to swim out dere?"

"No, Get over to Lake Belzoni and I'll meet you at the Tippecanoe Club and we'll go over in a motorboat. Two hours."

"Awright."

"Tom, I wanta speak at you a minute," he said, trying to be jovial. It didn't work. It never does.

When the other two had left, he said, "Riding with Harker, huh?"

"He asked."

"Well, uh, keep your eyes and ears open."

"For what?"

"The monster of Lake Belzoni you and Forster created."

I laughed. "Thought you thought it was real."

"All the old ladies sure did. You boys make up one this summer, you get to investigate the complaints."

HARKER DROVE DOWN avenues lined with water oaks protecting the Victorian gingerbread clapboards and the occasional Greek Revival plastered-brick

mansions from the wide asphalt of Pioneer Street, then turned left on Highway 98, took another right three blocks east and found the Old Lake Road winding through pastures and open lots, past the ranch houses and the two authentic antebellum mansions the town owns at the edge of town, then turned left again, onto a state highway. Charolais grazed in pastures north of the road and the Delaval Soy Sauce factory hummed away down a muddy road to the south.

This was Out in the County, where narrow buckling concrete highways ran along the tops of what are really big dykes. We crossed mud flats and rice paddies to the right and left as far ahead and behind as a man could see. Out here, just before planting, there was nothing but black mud and blue sky and somewhere on the fringes lines of dead cypresses and bare black oaks.

I asked Harker how long he'd been a deputy (six years, had been tractor repairman before that) and how he liked his job (it was cleaner, more dignified) and what he did on patrol:

"Well, I just cruise. Let 'em know the high sherf is still runnin' the roads, in the person of Ed Harker, scopin' things out."

"Right."

"You know, me and Sherf Ed is ole runnin' buddies."

"You are?" I said, a little too quickly.

He caught it, clenched his jaw, then went on: "We're both old Webster County boys — you know, over there in the pra-rairie country?"

"Right."

"I uz hired by the old sheriff, Booker." He looked at me. "Hired when James Earl was breaking down under the strain of being such a sumbitch and drink-in' all that sorry corn." He looked out across the flat fields. The country gravel roads looked dry. This land was buckshot and it held water a long time. Dry roads, wet fields, a farmer's dream. A puff of air, warm, fragrant with cowshit and stale earth broken open and dry gravel and wet trees wafted through the car, then was gone. "James Earl was happy as hell about it, as you can imagine," and he gave a nasty little laugh at the end of the surprising soupcon of sarcasm.

"I understand."

"So I guess I'd been there three years when Sherf Ed come in to inspect all his deputies and he ast me where I's from. Right out. Caught somethin' in the way I talk, I reggon. I tole him, and come to find out his wife's cousin was my aunt. Looks like she coulda tole me."

He lit a Pall Mall and held it so the fire burned back, back, back and then he held it in the slipstream of air rushing past the windows. The fire was blown off the end. He had to relight it.

He lit it, finally, but on one side, and the paper burned, but not the tobacco and it fell apart, mostly in his lap, including the fire. He picked up the tiny coal, cursing, and threw it on the floor. Smoking cigarettes in a car was not one of his talents, I saw. And almost laughed, remembering the trusty serving him coffee. Termite, who was an habitue of the jail, usually for not making child support payments, had been serving. From the left. Impressed by this bit of social rehab, I looked at him fixing the coffee. He picked his nose before picking out a cube of sugar for Harker's coffee. So social rehab still waited afar. Or something else was near.

"So yall are tight?"

"Tight. Oh yeah, tight. He invited me over to his home and goddam, you never saw such whiskey and food."

"Really"

"Aw yeah, aw yeah. His wife went out to the Colonel Sanders and brought back a couple of them buckets, you know, then we used real knives and forks and had ourselves a eat-in." He smiled at his little witticisms. "A eat-in," he repeated. He laughed when I was too slow. "Then we had us some potato salad she fixed the day before and some Piggly Wiggly Ice Cream and a cake bought outa the hotel coffee shop."

"Sounds good."

"Oh, man, we — uh, oh: gotta stop."

"Naw, not really."

We were a mile away from a crossroads: a north-south country road humped over the state highway, coming from God knows and going who knows. Just to the left of the intersection, on an apron of gravel, was a dusty country juke joint, covered with green asbestos shingles, roof and all four sides, and guarded by two rusty Sinclair gas pumps and a big board with the picture of a green dinosaur, who had been riddled by passing motorists carrying riflemen in the front seat. Beyond was a field of late robins hopping in the mud.

He stomped the brakes so hard they locked. The car fishtailed all over the highway, rubber peeling off in big scabs, the tires stinking so bad I thought I'd choke. He cut the wheel hard right at the last possible moment and we dove off the state highway and landed with a symphony of squeaks and groans and rips and screeches about two feet from the door of the juke joint. I was stomping imaginary brakes and trying to push myself backwards through the seat. The nose dipped and we stopped dead and I banged my head on the windshield and the deputy hopped out.

The fine yellow-white dust that had already settled into the fabric of the seat covers swirled up and the reddish coarse gravel dust billowed in and I had to get out and walk over to the telephone pole for a deep breath.

I heard two little cracks, like firecrackers far off. The wind was in my face and I could breathe again. I heard black people inside pleading and promising and Harker yelling. Sighing, I got back in the car.

Harker came out with a fifth of *Rebel Yell* in its gray cloth bag and a fistful of money. He tucked the money in his pocket and shoved the whiskey across the seat at me. "My part time job is representin' Arcola Amusements and these boys thought they'd play a jook from Delta Fun Company. I set 'em straight. Took the commission the company shoulda had. If you know what I mean."

"Sure."

"Not on my beat, they don't," he said as we drove south across the fields.

"Right."

"Here, here's a fifth of *Rebel Yell* on me and every time you mention me in your paper, I'll send you five bucks in a plain envelope."

I picked up the fifth. Another bribe. But what hurt was what they thought I was worth. "No thanks."

His face turned ugly. "Too good to drink my whiskey?"

I took off the seal and cracked it. "With the clear understanding it's yours ..." I said, and took a big drink. It was awful. And warm.

"You'll get your five ever Monday."



"And the DA'll get it that afternoon."

The muscles under his eyes twitched. There was a world out there full of things mysterious and wonderful and uptown, some of them immensely profitable, and all of them beyond the ken of people like Harker. But at least he knew he didn't understand and wanted to understand. I've seen that hollow, twitchy look all my life on the faces of men like Harker who think the stink of the cowbarn and the smell of defeat has been washed off them, dirt farms and rusty barbed wire back there in another life, or in lives already past. And rented apartments in scummy parts of defeated little towns, but they never lose it. Intimate that Something Is Going On, that they're making fools of themselves at the wrong altars while the priests are laughing at them, you get that hollow, twitchy, whipped-after-all look. I don't like to see it and don't like to be hated because they're not In On It and won't ever be and they assume I am, but that hollow, twitchy look is somehow so damned satisfying. I took a drink and smiled at him.

He started to say something, then the radio squawked: "Harker: Wabba dab rokkkk rok durg."

"Got it!" he yelled, and then looked at me, "Now you gonna see something, you weird bastard," and floored it.

"What the hell —"

"Shooting at the Shehaddy place. Clarence is there but he's a nigger."

WE FISHTAILED DOWN narrow dirt cotton wagon tracks, ripped up bushes with the incurve of the back bumper, scared off the robins, and then were across a wooden bridge over a small slough choked with cypress and out on a gravel road heading east along the northern shore of Lake Belzoni.

"Well there's just one thing about it," he said. "You're not gonna be *able* to keep my name *out* of your paper, because Ed Harker can solve a big crime like ringin' a bell, Sherf Ed and all his gadgets and files and computers and all that be damned. Boy, I'm tellin' you, I —"

"I understand. I'll be fair."

"Well, all right."

"Have a drink."

"No thanks. Never touch it. My old man used to drink Old Crow and beat the dog shit outa me."

The radio crackled. "Ba roo da Mouhi. Bar roo ya murkr."

His face turned pink and he pressed the knob on the mike and yelled, "Got it!" He turned to me. "It's murder. The old man killed on his couch. Now you gonna see the *hound* in action."

The Shehaddies lived in a small brick house two miles away, behind thick boxhedge festooned

with orange trumpet vine, some of the orange blossoms already open, their mouths blaring mutely across the muddy lake. The shore curved in at the end of the hedge.

The yard was enclosed by box-hedge except for a small space a few yards across where a fishing pier went out across cypress knees, pointing at the south shore. In a corner was a jumble of azaleas, pink and red and purple, rich as blood and as thick as the prayers of the dying. But they hadn't been cared for: Something, probably a cow, had taken huge chunks out of the plants, ruining their shape. To the left of the small unenclosed front porch was a big Walker dog, a pretty animal but dirty and matted and forlorn-looking. It howled and was joined by a big Irish setter, equally dirty. There were shiny holly bushes jammed up close to the house, shining waxily and in a concrete planter low gray plants with gray stems and gray leaves. They reminded me of leprosy. A whiskey bottle lay in the grass just a yard away from the porch. Empty. A Mantovani corruption of some pop song blared from somewhere deep in the house.

Clarence admitted us and suddenly we were standing on a mouse-gray carpet looking at Shehaddy, who was lying on his back on the couch, his pants unzipped, his mouth open, a small blue hole in his temple, a mess on the back of the couch and on his

right shoulder.

I looked away, took a drink. The whiskey seemed to have a wonderful bouquet and a piquant taste and lots of warm, wonderful body.

"Put that away," Harker murmured, and then in the same tone but to himself: "Old men, never zipping their flies."

Shehaddy looked sweaty and dirty and was looking sweatier and dirtier, and smaller, by the minute. Nothing else was sweaty and dirty. The walls had been painted white and old-fashioned antimacassars put on the backs of chairs and every other spot swept, swept, swept and dusted, dusted, dusted, Shehaddy was a big, dirty, sweating, bloody, shrinking embarrassment to the decor.

The door opened to our left, and a young, chunky woman wearing a blonde beehive, nice crisp white shirt, too much rouge, a crisp blue skirt, no stockings and brown nonsense shoes took a look at us and began bawling, and Harker took her back into the room where she'd been waiting.

"You gotta catch that nigger boy!" I heard her shout in the other room.

"In the kitchen," Clarence said, "and don't touch nothin', newspaperman."

"Care for a drop of *Rebel Yell*? All right, all right, I'm leaving."

"Like I don't be here and me called the High Sherf," I heard Clarence mumble behind me.

Someone had left a paper sack full of cool beer. It had probably been cold a half hour before, on the table. And a box of chocolates. Someone had peed in the sink. Some flowers had been thrown at the wall and lay wilting on the floor.

"Yessir," I heard an old woman saying at the top of her voice from the front of the house with the clear enunciation of those used to speaking to the deaf. "I heard the shots about five minutes ago, just as I was comin' round that grove of cypress and then I pulled up and she was pointing where he run to."

"You see him?" I barely heard Harker say.

"I did see the bushes rustle."

I sighed and looked now for the first time at the window, or where the window had been, in the door opening from the kitchen onto the sideyard. Beyond was a clump of Spanish sword and cane and rhododendron. The shot had made a lot of smash and tinkle and there was the hole, right below the clock, where the bullet had gone into the wall. I sighed again and took a big sip of *Rebel Yell*.

The gun was not outside. I looked under the steps, in the bushes, under the bushes, over the bushes, in the garbage, under the garbage and then looked out gloomily at the lake and the cypress knees. It wasn't in the lake. Or was it? Would the old woman have seen the ripples from

the place where the gun had hit the water at the end of her desperate toss? The water was muddy. The cypress was thick.

I walked back into the kitchen. Harker was inside, walking back and forth with a satisfied grin on his face and rattling a key ring. I leaned on the big stand-up freezer and looked at him.

Clarence stuck his head in the door. "He at Six Mile. Be here in a few minutes."

Harker opened the refrigerator, made a face, took out only a Pepsi, began looking at the key ring in his hand. I saw that the stand-up freezer was padlocked. The maid or cook or both no doubt stole. And no doubt Harker would use her keys and be inside stealing too in a few minutes. "Goddammit, a murder case, a real murder case!" he said, as exulting in his great good fortune.

I took out a Pepsi, poured half of it in the garbage can, poured in some *Rebel Yell*, threw the rest of the fifth in the garbage can. I know my limits.

"What's her story?" I said.

"Well you heard some of it I guess if you were within a mile of the ole lady. Hey, you wouldn't be gettin' shitfaced on the job, would you? you look pink."

"Yeah? You want this murder solved?"

He looked at me as if I had mange. "Yeah, yeah, just go."

The sheriff's car pulled up and I heard her bawling and then they

drove away. I had some fortified Pepsi. "They tole me you were a boozier," the deputy said.

"You better shake that little dear until the bees fall out of her beehive, until she tells you where she hid the pistol."

That stopped him. He looked at me as if I were asking him if he wanted to catch mange himself.

"Yeah, Harker. The old man came in ripped. He wanted to do something depraved. Or maybe he was just so drunk he asked and did things he wouldn't have ordinarily. Or maybe he's that way. Those azaleas and those dogs aren't hers. He had flowers for her but he was drunk, so she threw 'em at the wall ..."

"What a goddam waste of money," he muttered. "I give you some whiskey and you get so drunk you can't cover me investigatin' the case."

"He lay on the couch and called her in to do something wifely for him. She'd had it. She got *her* gun, a little one, maybe a .32, and stood by him and put one in his brain. It singed her stockings or messed them up — there's some spray that close to the muzzle — so she knew she had to come up with a story. She ran out and fired ... " Now I stopped. I'd heard the two shots she'd gotten off before ditching the gun and having a sympathetic almost-eye witness dumped in her lap by blind luck.

"Hey, so drunk your tongue

swole up?" he yelled. "Now first place, you *smart* college boy, a woman cain't kill a man with a gun. Second, the same boy pulled a robbery like this three months ago, come in the front, cleaned these people out, run out the back and, after puttin' a round through the window to keep their heads down, run off across the fields. I know who he is and where he lives and we'll get him." He smiled. "See, you just a dumb-ass, that's all, besides being a drunk. Now, get off that freezer door if you can still stand. Won't hurt nothin' and you ain't gonna tell Ed 'cause I'll tell your boss you're a drunk if you do. And that you take bribes."

"Yeah, don't forget that part. And don't forget to look outside. That pistol is in the bushes, or —"

Then I saw it. Inside double thickness of foil, looking in outline very much like a pork chop, and the first thing Ed Harker had put his hand on, was something even he wouldn't be able to eat, something even his hunger couldn't consume, that would break even his teeth. And for God's sake, he'd won after all: she had come back inside, put her .32 revolver inside tinfoil and put the thing in the freezer, padlocked it, and run outside to find her serendipitous witness. It shone like damnation.

"Start writing it up, smart boy."

I nodded and sat down.

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# Now Pull the Trigger

by ROBERT HOSKINS

After nearly three months of tracking the man across four states, he'd found his prey. And now it was time for the kill!

**WATER DRIPS.** The drops gather on the jagged edge of rusty iron up there above me, trickling down from the old-cut rock and condensing from the air in this old mine shaft. I can visualize the droplet as it grows larger, as two drops come together to make a bigger one, until the weight is too heavy and gravity pulls the drop over the edge. It makes the long fall into the shaft then, and I can count the seconds until the hollow *plop* comes from the pool at the bottom. Sometimes the echo is almost like music.

Almost six seconds. Close to four hundred feet, if I still remember my high school physics after twenty-five years. Amazing, that eighty or ninety years ago men should have dug so far down into the bowels of this mountain in their search for gold and silver. I should think they'd have found it easier to come in at a new entrance, lower on the slopes.

Each time a drop falls I start counting again: half a minute this time, ninety seconds the next. There's no logic to the interval, no way to estimate when the next drop will break free. The Chinese made a torture out of it, and they

were right. I think I'm going mad. The human mind is too fragile to concentrate for long hours on so insignificant a thing as the erratic fall of a single water drop. Perhaps I'm already mad.

Hanks is below me, not very far down.

"You there, Hanks? You hear me?"

He doesn't answer, although I can turn my head and see the beam of his lantern pointing up from the darkness, lighting the edge of the platform above. I know he landed on a shelf like mine, he can't be more than fifteen or twenty feet below me. Dust motes dance in the pale beam of light, outlining its cone. My nostrils are filled with the smell of ancient rock dust, kicked free when the rotten boards of the platform gave beneath our weight and dropped us into this hole.

My back is broken. I heard my spine snap when I landed on this piece of machinery, and of course my legs are paralyzed. Nothing at all below my waist.

"Hanks! Answer me, damn you!"

I'm wasting breath. Where are those damn tourists?

Cold. Growing colder. I shiver; shock is setting in. The temperature inside these mountains does not vary by more than a few degrees winter and summer, no matter what happens outside. My fingers are growing numb, although I can still move my left hand. My right arm is paralyzed, just like my legs.

*"Hanks!"*

My throat hurts with yelling. It seems like days since we fell, although in truth it probably isn't more than an hour or so. The beam from Hanks' lantern is still strong, hardly fading. How long will the battery last? Quite awhile, I suppose, if it was new.

I'm beginning to feel sleepy. That's dangerous. A person weakened by shock can die if left exposed very long. I suppose I'm exposed, here on this shelf. I'm afraid I'm going to die.

Was it worth it, coming this far to find him?

I know I'm going to die ...

THERE WAS EAGER summer noise coming from the swimming pool at the center of the apartment complex, the sounds of a score or more bodies splashing, laughing, calling. The manager smiled as she turned the key in the office door then led me down the cool corridor between the two buildings.

*"Is it always this noisy?"*

"Well, maybe days. But the young people are pretty good at night, Mr. Somers. We don't let

them play their stereos loud, or have rowdy parties."

*"I like it quiet."*

*"—So do I, Mr. Somers."*

The manager was in her fifties, a short woman with badly-dyed orange hair. We climbed concrete stairs, stopped while she used her master key on the brindle door. Musty air hit us as the door opened, heavy with the smell of disinfectant and carpet cleaner. The air in the apartment was cool, but dead from disuse.

"One bedroom. The bath's through here."

She pulled a cord and the short drapes over the living room window opened, dispelling some of the gloom. The manager opened a wall panel and pulled circuit breakers, and the overhead light came on in the short hall.

"The gas man won't be back until tomorrow, so you won't be able to cook tonight. You'll have to go into the local office to pay the deposit — fifteen dollars. The phone company is about a mile down Marconi Avenue, just past McDonald's and Van's Market, on your right. There's a ten dollar deposit on the electricity. That's the one good thing about living in Sacramento, the utility's are still cheap, although goin' higher just like everything else. They'll let you put it in the mail. I'll call them when I get back to the office and they'll send a man out to take a reading, probably tomorrow. That's all right, isn't it?"



"Fine," I said, nodding approval. Although there was little to approve. Standard furniture: a garish print sofa with soiled cushions and two low-backed easy chairs. A plastic covered coffee table and two square end tables. A rickety dinette and four chairs at the far end of the room, near the kitchenette's serving counter.

"Then you'll take it?"

"Yes, this will do nicely," I said, taking out my wallet. "You said fifty for cleaning deposit, and one month's rent?"

"Well, twenty-two days, actually — we pro-rate it." She seemed relieved; I wondered what her vacancy rate was. "Let's see, this unit is \$5.40 a day, times twenty-two days. That comes to —"

"\$118.50," I said, finishing the calculations for her. "Plus fifty." I gave her a hundred, a fifty and a twenty. "You can give me the change later. I'll have to open a local checking account in a few days."

"It will be \$174 for the whole month, Mr. Somers, due the first. But we don't say anything so long as you pay by the fifth. I'll have your change and your lease when you stop by the office later."

"I'll do that. Thanks."

I managed to shoo her out after five hundred more words, and watched her waddle down the stairs before closing the drapes. Then I opened the ones on the end wall and slid open the door, stepped out onto the balcony. I couldn't

see the pool, but I did have a nice view of the parking lot and the garbage bins.

I was in.

I went back to the apartment and went around opening all of the windows. To get rid of the musty smell. I wouldn't need the gas, since I'd be doing no cooking. And I certainly wouldn't be here through the winter. But for appearance sake, tomorrow I'd arrange for the turn on. And for the telephone, as well.

Leaving the front door open to help the air circulate, I went down to the street and moved my car into the lot on the back side of the building, out of the sun. I came back by the swimming pool. A buxom blonde in an almost-decent white bathing suit smiled and waved.

"Hi, there! Moving in?"

It was a logical question to ask someone with an armload of clothes on hangers and a portable tv dangling from his free hand. I smiled in return, admiring the view, and said, "Yeah."

"Great place. You'll like it."

"I'm sure I will. My name's Ray Somers."

"Ginny Pipkin." That's what she said. "Glad to meet you, Ray."

My cheeks felt numbed with the strain of holding the smile and not breaking out in laughter as I took my possessions up to the apartment and dumped them, and came out for a second load.

For now, I was content to drop everything on the bed and went

back into the living room to attach the tv to the master antennae. No matter how empty a furnished apartment might be of the fixtures of permanent residence, people who see a television set hooked up assume that you're there to stay.

I tested the set, found it working on four local channels with decent reception, then switched off the mindless daytime blather. Then I sat down in one of the easy chairs and folded my hands in my lap.

I was here.

Hanks was here.

His apartment was downstairs, three removed from mine at the rear end of the wing and with a high-fenced patio of its own. I had asked casually for what was available on the west side, explaining that I wanted to avoid the morning sun in my bedroom. I also asked for the first floor but this was all that was available. It would have been too much to expect everything to work out perfectly.

So close. My fingers worked. So close.

I WAITED AN HOUR, not moving from the chair, before going out to visit the Lucky market on the corner. I timed it right: Hanks came home just before 5:30, parking in one of the reserved carports. I got out of my own car with a bag of groceries, managing to spill the over-balanced items from the top just as he came by. I juggled the bag while he bent to retrieve what I had dropped.

"Thanks," I said, recovering.

"Not at all." He smiled. "Just moving in?"

"Right." My eyes flicked in the direction of the pool. "Looks like a good place for a guy on the loose."

Hanks laughed. "It sure is, partner. There's more girls than men, sharing apartments."

"That's what caught my eye when I scouted the place." I laughed with him. "How about a cold beer? I've got a fresh six-pack."

"Not today; but thanks. I've got a date."

"Some other time, then."

"Sure. Some other time."

I watched Hanks move ahead of me, his shaggy Robert Redford locks bouncing jauntily off his collar. He was goodlooking, I couldn't deny that. It was easy to see why girls, even why women who should have been old enough to know better, fell for the charm bit. Hanks was one of the with-it generation, totally sure of himself. He knew where it was — and what it was.

Upstairs I dropped the bag of groceries on the counter and sank onto a stool for several minutes while the hollow feeling came back into my gut. Below, a door slammed and a girl yelled to a boy; that brought me out of my funk. I stood and stowed away the groceries: bread and cold cuts and potato chips and the odds and ends that everybody needs, such

as toilet paper and paper towels and soap. And a TV Guide. I popped the top on a can of beer and sat down with the magazine, discovered that Star Trek would be coming up on Channel 40 at six. I wasn't in the mood for news, and nothing else on the available channels appealed. So I sat back in the sprung chair, sipping at the beer, to wait out the twenty minutes.

Step one accomplished: I had found him.

Step two accomplished: I had met him.

Step three:

What next, Mr. Somers?

I don't know, I said, answering myself after careful thought. I guess we'll have to wing it. The important step was number one. Step three will take care of itself. But even as I formed the thought I grew conscious of cold beer spilling across my hand. I had crumpled the half-empty aluminum can ...

Damn you, Hanks!

Damn you!

I sighed. After nearly three months of tracking him across four states, I had found him. He was always on the move, but this was home base. He might take off again tomorrow, but in time he'd come back, come here. I wanted to have it over and done with, but I could wait right here as long as necessary.

THE NEXT AFTERNOON I again

maneuvered to be in the parking lot when Hanks got home, and nodded acknowledgement of his wave. My heart beat faster, but I hung back until he went into his own place. All things in good time.

I missed Hanks the next day, but the day after caught him again. This time I said something about slipping into a cold beer and then into the pool, but didn't renew my earlier invitation. He came out with trunks on when I was drying off from my swim and stretched out on an air mattress, on his belly, soaking up the late sun.

The fourth day I asked Hanks to recommend a good neighborhood bar. The city was baking under the seventh day of a good central California heat wave, and there were only three die-hards soaking up sun by the pool. Two were girls. Hanks eyed them hungrily, but shook his head.

"Morons!" he said, sotto-voice as we passed. "Weather like this you stay inside during the day, let the air conditioner run full out. The Paddle Wheel on Fair Oaks isn't a bad place, three blocks-up. You know where it is?"

"I've seen the sign. Thanks. I'll give it a try."

"Maybe I'll see you there later, if I don't scout up some action for the evening. They've got pretty good ribs. I usually drop in about eight."

I was there at 7:30. Hanks came

in ten minutes late, and stopped when he saw me nursing a beer. I waved him over and he dropped into the booth with a sigh.

"No action?" I asked.

"All the chicks are restin' up for the weekend. Man, this heat better break soon. It's killin' me, hours out under the hot sun."

"What sort of work you do?"

"Commercial photographer, Somers." By now we had introduced ourselves formally. "I'm a freelancer, but I do a lot of work for a couple of San Francisco ad agencies. Makes for a hell of a lot of travel, but there's compensations. The money's good — " He grinned conspiratorially. " — and I've scored in some of the most unlikely towns in America."

I grinned back at young America in full bloom, even though I wanted to reach across the table and smash the beer bottle in his face. Damn you, Hanks! My stomach turned over, and I regretted the plate of ribs I had finished a few minutes ago. Ellie's dead, damn you!

"Ah, at least tomorrow will be better," he said, accepting a Dos Equis from the barmaid who brought it over without waiting for the order. She had a refill for me as well, and Hanks staved off my protest as he fumbled money from his pocket.

"This round's on me. You can get the next one."

"Thanks." I killed my old beer, started the new one. "What's

coming off tomorrow?"

"I've got to run up to Nevada, scout out a couple of the ghost towns for a project. It will be cool enough in the Sierras."

"Sounds interesting. Wouldn't mind going along for the ride — if you don't mind a passenger."

As soon as the words were out of my mouth I regretted pushing so fast. I was impatient, but I could blow it all now. He eyed me, I was sure with suspicion.

"What sort of work do you do? Somers?" he asked casually, tipping his glass and letting the beer run slowly down the side.

"Right now, nothing," I replied. "Sort of at loose ends, you might say. My wife died a few months ago, and things seemed kinda bleak without her. I sold out our store and came out here looking for something different to do. Signed the final papers last week, picked up the check."

Was I talking too fast? My heart pounded like it was trying to explode from my chest.

"What brought you to Sacramento? This isn't exactly the garden spot of the west, unless you're in the military, or work for the state."

"Got a brother here working for the Air Force," I said. "He likes it here, told me I should give it a try. So far I can't say I'm impressed, but you never know."

"No, you never do." He bought it. "Your brother at McClellan?"

"Mather."

"Um, If you want to come along

for the ride, it's okay by me. Be glad to have the company — it gets lonely pushing over some of those mountain roads. We'll be startin' early, though — it's 125 miles to Carson City, and another 95 south to Bodie. The last thirteen miles are straight through the desert, unpaved washboard, but I guarantee that the scenery is worth it. Got some heavy shoes?"

"Engineer boots."

"Perfect. You'll want a jacket. It can get damn cold when the sun goes down, and in some of the old shafts."

"How early is early?" I asked, trying to hide my growing excitement.

"6:30. I'll be having breakfast at the Coffee Castle, right around the corner from Marconi on Fair Oaks."

"Good enough," I said. "I ate there this morning."

Satisfied, I ordered another round and sat back while Hanks started to work his way through a plate of ribs. He didn't suspect a thing ...

Damn you, Hanks!

**THE BEERS KEPT COMING** and Hanks kept pouring them down, until finally he left about midnight. I watched him weave out the door, then drained the last of my beer before following, cold sober. I couldn't sleep for excitement, and was at the coffee shop twenty minutes early, when Hanks came dragging in looking like

death warmed over.

"Oh, Jesus!" he said, moaning. "How much did I drink last night?"

"Less than a case," I said, smiling.

"Jesus!" he closed his eyes, then opened one to study me through the crack. "You don't even look hungover. I hate bastards like you, Somers!"

Not as much as I hate you, Hanks!

He began sucking down coffee, and to my surprise, by the time I finished eating he was ready to go. I followed him back to the apartment complex, where he ushered me into a Toyota Jeep. It was a beautiful day to escape to the mountains, although incoming traffic on Route 50 was already heavy as people headed into the city for work. Sacramento is an early city: early in the morning, and early to close up at night.

By the time we reached Placerville traffic was heavy heading east, and painfully slow when the freeway ended and we had to fight our way up the last forty miles of two-lane road to Echo Summit. As usual on mountain roads, I was repeatedly trapped behind big trucks and campers as I drove the Toyota and Hanks dozed. There aren't enough turn-outs; it took seventy minutes to make that forty miles.

But at last we were on our way down to Lake Tahoe. It took us another thirty minutes to make it

through the city, even though Hanks gave me directions that bypassed the main roads. We came back on the highway near Stateline and the major casinos, waiting for the California suckers to come with hands out and full of money. Harrah's parking lot was in California, the casino entrance right on the state boundary.

I'm not a gambler. I was glad to break free of the traffic. We were in Carson City by 9:30, Virginia City by 10:15. The road south was desolate as we moved higher into the mountains, although beautiful in its desolation.

We passed through a few scattered small villages as we headed south again, headed back toward California. We crossed Devil's Gate summit at 7,519 feet, and seventeen miles later stopped in Bridgeport for gas and to buy packaged sandwiches at a general store. Then south again, slowing after a few miles, until at last Hanks found the sight and directed me onto the unpaved road that headed east into the desert. In minutes it was as though we were lost in the timeless past as the Toyota struggled through the terrible ruts of the road. Another thirty minutes passed before we at last came to the ghost town of Bodie, California.

There was something almost peaceful about the old mining town as I first saw the russet and gold buildings. And then the impression was spoiled as I saw a

Tourist's camper and a van full of raucous youngsters. But Hanks told me not to stop. We moved on through the town and toward the mountain rising before us, the signs of tourists' intrusion fading again as the road degenerated into barely marked ruts.

And at last we reached our goal. I stopped the Toyota in front of the ruins of a century-old mining complex, tailings spilling down the side of the raped mountain as they slumped in their permanent angle of repose. Hanks groaned as he climbed out, hobbling the first dozen steps like an old man, even though he was fifteen years younger than me. Then he worked the kinks out of his muscles, and scrambled up the side of the hill.

I followed with difficulty, pausing to catch my breath and peer into one of the ruined buildings. We carried jackets although the sun was hot. Then I reached the dark hole in the mountain that marked the mine tunnel, and found him a hundred feet inside, shining his lantern into the depths below.

"Got your light, Somers?"

I switched on my own lantern, looking back. The entrance to the tunnel was a square of sky that seemed white against the gloom of the mine. We slipped into our jackets, for it was at least twenty degrees cooler inside. Must and dank cobwebs were everywhere.

"Probably have to build a new

ladder," said Hanks, moving around the lip of the vertical shaft. His light fell into the depths until the cone was lost in the darkness. He dropped a pebble; it was a long time before we heard the splash.

"You're going down there?" I asked, surprised.

"Not today. When I come up to do the job."

I leaned against an upright and wiped cold sweat from my brow with my handkerchief. "I guess you're pretty well known in your line of work."

"I've made a name for myself," he admitted, and grinned. "Beats digging ditches."

"Pretty popular with the girls, too," I said.

"What?" He glanced at me in growing suspicion. "What the hell is this, Somers — twenty questions?"

"I can see how the girls would go for you, Hanks. I guess if I was a girl, I'd go for you myself."

"What the hell are you babbling about?"

"Remember a girl named Ellie, Hanks? Four months ago, it was. In New Mexico. While you were doing the story on the Painted Desert. At least, that's what you said you were doing. You spent most of your time chasing skirts."

He backed away, eyes narrowed. I saw his fingers work as he considered taking a swing at me.

"What's this Ellie to you?" he asked.

I sighed, relieved. "You do remember her."

"Sure. She was a nice kid. Married to a clown old enough to be her father and damn unhappy about it. You're the husband, right?"

"Ellie wasn't so unhappy before you came to town," I said, not answering his question. "Maybe life wasn't very exciting, but it was good."

"Okay, so she was Mrs. America. And I was the bad guy. So what?"

"She thought you were going to marry her."

He stared, then laughed, raucously. "Oh, Christ! You gotta be puttin' me on!"

"You didn't promise to marry her?"

"I never promise a damn thing! I'm out for fun and games, and I make it plain that's all I'm doing. If Ellie told you I promised to marry her, she was smoking something more than Camels, mister whatever-your-name is. It sure ain't Somers."

"Ellie was pregnant."

He froze. Licked his lips. "It must have been yours. If you're the husband. She was married to you, it must have been yours."

"I can't have kids, Hanks. It wasn't mine."

"You're gonna find it hard provin' it's mine, mister. If you got some crazy idea about takin' me to court ..."



"Ellie's dead."

Hanks blinked, and shook his head. Twenty seconds passed and then he sighed. "That's too bad. What happened?"

"She was following you. She panicked when you took off without a word. She never even gave me a chance to say it was all right, that I forgave her. I'd have taken the baby as my own. But she had the crazy idea of catching up to you, that you'd make an honest woman out of her."

"She was ... hell, maybe I would have."

"We'll never know, will we? The highway patrol said she was doing a hundred when she ran head-on into the tractor trailer. The truck was doing at least eighty. When they put out the fire there was nothing left of her and the driver but some charred meat and broken bones."

Hanks' tongue touched his lips and he held his breath a moment. At last he let it out, shaking his head.

"I'm sorry, Somers — Workman. That's your name, isn't it?" I nodded yes. "I'm sorry she's dead. I'm sorry she was trying to follow me. But what do you want from me? I can't bring her back."

I showed him the gun.

"Jesus!" He backed away. "Put that damn thing away!"

"The Bible says an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth."

"You're crazy! Shooting me isn't gonna do a damn thing for

Ellie! Give me the gun!"

He kept backing away as he said it; he took me by surprise when he jumped me before I had a chance to pull the trigger. I held on to the gun, but his arms were around me and then he got me down. We rolled around on the floor of the mine tunnel, dangerously close to the edge of the vertical shaft.

"Give it to me!" he said. "Let go!"

I cursed him, but he was stronger. He was about to beat me down when I managed to turn the gun, pull the trigger. The shot knocked Hanks away.

"You ... damn fool!"

Hanks staggered to his feet and I got up, shooting again. A third time, as I followed him to the edge of the drop. With three of my bullets in him he still wasn't dead, but he backed too far. His foot went over the edge, and he lost his balance.

I should have shot him again. I shouldn't have followed, shouldn't have tried to kick his hand free of the rotten platform. Hanks grabbed my leg, pulled me off balance. We went over together ...

I'M SURE IT'S GETTING colder, and the light from his lantern is growing weaker. There's something ghostly in the way it catches the edge of my foot where it hangs over the shelf. I can almost see myself fading away into nothing. Maybe I'm already a ghost.

I can still move my fingers, my left arm. Enough to touch the gun. Now I'm lifting it, dragging it up onto my chest. It's a struggle, but I can do it. Now I can see the hole in the end of the barrel ... there. My finger just went through the finger guard. There's ... how many bullets are left? Two? Three?

It doesn't make any difference. With luck, I'll be able to pull the trigger once more. I'm going to pull the trigger once more.

When I first fell down this damn shaft after Hanks, I thought instantly of the tourists down in Bodie. I knew they'd come up and find me, save me. But it wouldn't do any good; they'd find Hanks, too.

I think I hear them now. It must be the kids. Raucous. I hate loud noise. The gun shots were almost deafening, although I really heard only the first one. I felt the others when the gun kicked against my hand.

I know I'm dying. That's okay. Ellie's dead. Without her, I have no reason for living. We did love each other, you know, despite what she told Hanks. I know she loved me just as much as I still love her. I can't face the thought of spending the rest of my life without her. There's no reason to go back to New Mexico, go home. All that's left now is for me to pull the trigger one more time.

Before the kids find me. And save me ...

Continued from page 4

*manager, file clerk, janitor, music critic, song writer, book reviewer and soldier. Yet writing has always been his first love, with music (jazz, blues, rock and classical) running a close second. He currently lives in the mountains of southwestern Colorado. His booklength detective fiction appears under the pseudonym of "Stephen Brett," and includes SOME DIE HARD and THE VAMPIRE CHASE (both Manor Books, 1979). Under his own name, he has also contributed extensively to such fan journals of detective fiction as THE ARMCHAIR DETECTIVE, THE MYSTERY FANCIER and XENOPHILE.*

MARGARET B. MARON writes:

*This is my 3rd or 4th for MSMM. Others have been published in REDBOOK, MCCALL'S, HITCHCOCK and the short-lived EXECUTIONER, plus reprints in various anthologies here and abroad. A first mystery novel is currently making the rounds in NYC. My agent is not terribly optimistic — recommends more sex*  
Continued to page 121

# Let No Man Put Asunder

by MARGARET B. MARON

It should have been an easy job for an experienced burglar like Louie. But suddenly his arm blazed with pain, a light snapped on, and there was a young woman in the doorway, calmly fitting another arrow to her bowstring!

THE HOUSE WAS LIKE a handful of baby's blocks clumped down upon an exclusive hillside above town — wood and glass blocks, loosely connected by a multi-angled roof with only trustingly simple snap-locks to protect the contents from the naughty world. A piece of cake.

Louie flashed his penlight around the luxurious room,

gratified by all the easily-fenced, delightfully-portable objects which met his eyes — the porcelain figurines, a small French clock, the heavy silver table lighter — and he blessed their owners' fine traditional taste. Too often, modern architecture meant no ornaments beyond Mexican pottery, chunky wood carvings or some outlandish conglomerate

of chains and old plowshares welded together in the name of Art. The little thief preferred dainty miniatures which he could slip into the capacious pockets of his favorite working jacket.

Thick trees and shrubs had so screened the house from the road that he would never have noticed the unmarked drive had his attention not been directed to it. And to think he'd almost decided not to push his luck in this neighborhood anymore!

Moving noiselessly to avoid waking the woman who lay sleeping several wings away on the far side of the house, Louie pencilled his light into the adjoining room. He liked to examine all the merchandise before filling his shopping bag; and when he first saw the shelves of bright loving cups, he thought he'd struck gold, which — considering the price of silver these days — wasn't a bad analogy. But when he lifted one, he didn't need to read the recent date etched on the surface. By heft alone, he could tell these were made of cheap alloys and not the sterling of long ago.

His back to the door, Louie had replaced the cup and was just turning when two things happened simultaneously: a low voice said, "I really didn't think it'd be this simple!" and his right arm suddenly blazed with pain.

A light snapped on and Louie staggered around to see a young woman in the doorway, calmly

fitting another arrow to her bowstring. Horrified, he stared down at his arm, at the point of a steel arrow head piercing the front of his jacket sleeve. Before he could speak, the girl looked up from her task and her eyes widened in shocked surprise. "Why, you're a *burglar!*" she gasped and hastily stretched the bowstring to it tightest.

"Well what the hell did you think I was?" Louie cried, outrage mingling with fear at the way she kept that arrow pointed at his heart. His arm throbbed with every syllable and when he touched it, his hand came away wet and red. Unnerved at the sight of his own blood, Louie fainted dead away without waiting for her answer.

As he regained consciousness, Louie gradually became aware of the girl's calm voice: "— guess that's why I jumped the gun. Or should I say the arrow? With so many break-ins in the area lately, you can understand my nervousness, Sergeant."

He was dismayed to hear the familiar tones of his old nemesis, Sergeant Thaddeus Dixon, answer her, "Of course, Mrs. Harris. No way for you to know that Louie's as harmless as a fly."

Louie stiffened at the insult and the policeman noticed his movement. "With us at last, are you, Louie? How does the arm feel?"

Groaning, the little thief

glanced down and was relieved to see that the arrow was gone. A professional-looking bandage covered his flesh wound and eased the pain. "Thanks, Sarge," he muttered.

"Not me." Sergeant Dixon was clearly amused. "Mrs. Harris already had the arrow out before we got here. You can thank her for the first aid treatment."

"Thank her!" Louie made his voice that of an indignant citizen. "Here I try to help her and what thanks do I get? This — this Pocahontas shoots me full of arrows!" He glared at Mrs. Harris.

"Hold on," said Dixon. "You're getting your story confused. This is where you usually tell me about your car trouble and how you just let yourself in to phone for help because you didn't want to disturb anyone."

"Go ahead and sneer, Sarge; there are others who believed me."

"Only once," Dixon reminded him. "That second jury wasn't quite as gullible. Three to five the judge gave you, but I suppose you got time off for good behavior. If I'd known you were out, I'd have had you in for questioning before now."

"Then he's the one who's been breaking into all the houses around here?" asked Mrs. Harris, interestedly. She was tall and tanned and her bright golden hair had been cut short to form a

smooth, sleek cap. Her green eyes blazed with quick intelligence.

"Has someone been working this area?" Louie asked innocently. "You know, that must have been the guy I saw drive off about ten minutes before she started using me for target practice."

"Sure, sure," said the big police officer, genially.

"I *did*!" Louie insisted. "Listen, I was out driving around tonight, and I stopped for a smoke at the top of the hill there."

"And suddenly your car wouldn't start again?" suggested Dixon.

"Would you just lay off about car trouble?" Louie snarled. "There's nothing wrong with my car! My car goes just fine! That's not why I'm here. I was just sitting there, see, when *another* car drove up the hill and pulled into some bushes just across from this driveway; and I saw this guy pop out and sneak across the road like he didn't want anybody to see him. I wanted to see what he was up to, so I tailed him."

"And *he* was the one who broke in?"

Louie wasn't quite ready to touch upon that delicate issue yet, so he ignored Dixon and doggedly continued. "There were some lights from back of the house and I could see every move he made. He went straight around to the back and stopped outside

the brightest window where she was sleeping."

Sergeant Dixon was sceptical. "A peeping Tom?"

Louie shrugged and let a doubtful note creep into his voice. "Who knows? He was more interested in the time than the lady — kept looking at his watch like he was late for a bus. A real weirdo. After a few minutes, he sneaked on around the house and I took a look myself. Not peeping, you understand," he assured the girl, who was following every word intently. "Just to see what he'd been looking at. You could've gone to sleep with a book like it seemed, but for all I knew, he might've been there earlier and you were dead."

"Now, Louie," grinned the sergeant.

"Anyhow, I started to follow the peeper, but I got tangled up in a bush and he got ahead of me. That must've been when he opened the door around on this side." Dixon raised a disbelieving eyebrow at that, but Louie hurried on with his story. "I thought at first he was still inside, but then I heard his car start up on the road like he was in a big hurry. Well, what could I do?" he asked virtuously. "He might've been a firebug. The lady could've been roasted in her sleep. It was my civic duty to come in and make sure she was okay, wasn't it?"

Before Dixon could answer that, Mrs. Harris stood up and

smoothed her long skirt. "If you'll excuse me, Sergeant, I want to call again and see if they've located my husband yet."

Shelley Harris was not only slim and lovely, but she moved with an athlete's easy grace, and the two men watched in silent appreciation as she left the room.

Louie's arm had begun to throb again and Dixon shook his head sympathetically. "You were asking for it when you tried to rip off an archery champion," he said, gesturing at the loving cups she'd won in competition. "Too bad it wasn't her husband who caught you."

"What's he champion of?" Louie asked sourly. "Knife throwing?"

"Bridge," chuckled Dixon. "He writes a column for the newspapers. The worst he could have done was hit you with a deck of cards."

"Funny, Sarge, very funny. But I wasn't ripping them off. There really was another guy sneaking around here first to-night." Having produced that story, Louie stuck with it even though Dixon clearly wasn't buying.

"My husband should be here any moment now," said Mrs. Harris when she re-entered the room. "The tournament director said he left as soon as they told him, so you don't have to stay, Sergeant."

"It's no trouble," said Dixon.

"Besides, I want to check under your window outside."

"Surely you don't believe this man's absurd story?"

"We have to go through the motions. Come on, Louie. Show me where your peeper stood."

Louie led the way around the house. In the darkness outside, the girl's bedroom was a brilliant stage, but the grass beneath her window was so thick and springy a whole platoon of peeping Toms could have tiptoed past without leaving a trace. "Better go back to your engine trouble story," Dixon advised genially.

As they returned to the house, car lights swept up the drive and a dapper, middle-aged man of medium height rushed from the expensive sedan. "Are you all right, darling? They said someone broke in. Thank goodness you're safe! He could have killed you!"

Louie winced and Shelly Harris laughed outright. "Don't be silly, Winston. You should know by now I'm quite capable of defending myself." She started to introduce Sergeant Dixon, but the big policeman stepped forward and put out his hand.

"Glad to see you didn't suffer any permanent injury, Mr. Harris."

Winston Harris looked blank and the girl said, "You didn't mention that you knew my husband."

Before he could answer, Harris had placed him. "Of course!"

he smiled. "Sergeant Dixon, isn't it? You were the officer who radioed for a wrecker. You remember, dear — the night I cleaned out both ditches at the bottom of Daredevil Hill? This is the policeman who was so helpful after he realized my brakes had failed and that I wasn't roaring drunk. You seem to be Johnny-on-the-spot lately, Sergeant."

"We've had extra patrols in this area because of all the pilfering," said Dixon. "You'll be seeing a lot less of us now that your wife's caught him for us."

"Where were you tonight?" she asked curiously. "They couldn't find you the first time I called."

"You must have phoned in the middle of intermission. Jake and I finished our boards early and I'd gone out on the terrace for some fresh air."

"I hope you didn't have to leave an important tournament," Dixon inquired courteously.

"Oh no. The club has a duplicate match every week. Less than fifteen tables. It gives me a chance to experiment with a new bidding convention I'm developing."

Dixon nodded and beckoned to Louie, who'd been sitting near the door nursing his sore arm. "Let's go," he said and herded the little man into the patrol car waiting outside. Winston Harris stood silhouetted in the doorway as they drove off and Louie said, "Now



wait a minute, Sarge! You gotta believe me!"

"Later, Louie," Dixon said wearily. "You can give it to me from the top as soon as we get back to the station."

THE FOLLOWING NIGHT, Winston Harris was working on his weekly column in the glass block which constituted his study in the modernistic house. Several bridge hands lay face up on the felt tabletop before him and he was studying them intently when a small noise made him glance around. He expected to see his wife, but the open doorway was vacant and he could hear the faint sound of a television several rooms away as she watched the delayed broadcast of an archery tournament. Then a movement beyond the sliding glass door caught his eye and he saw Louie signalling to him.

Puzzled, Harris obeyed the silent entreaty and closed his study door before approaching Louie. "You have a nerve coming here again," he observed as he let the little man in. "I thought you were in jail."

"I'm out on bail," Louie said hoarsely. He'd never attempted anything like this before and he was nervous. "I figure you and me've got business to discuss."

Harris was disdainful. "What possible business could we have in common?"

"You get your wife to drop the

charges against me, and I won't tell her it was you I saw sneaking around here last night!"

The bridge expert frowned haughtily and Louie rushed on. "I didn't recognize you till we were driving away last night. I got to thinking: Mister, I don't know what kind of game you and Minnehaha are playing, but when she let fly with that arrow last night, she thought I was you."

Winston Harris resumed his seat at the felt-covered Queen Anne table, gathered in the cards and began to shuffle them thoughtfully.

"The way I figure it," said Louie, "last night had to be a trial run. You were seeing if you had time to get up here and back before that intermission was over and somebody missed you."

"Don't be ridiculous."

"Me? What about you? You may fool the police, but you didn't fool me, and you sure as hell don't fool that wife of yours. She's on to you, Mister, and she plays rough. That accident you had the other night — did the brakes really quit all by themselves?"

The question hit home.

"Do you play bridge?" Harris asked. "No? Too bad. You seem to possess the necessary rudiments of deductive insight to make a fair beginner." He squared the edges of the cards and placed the decks in neat alignment. "What did the police say about your allegations?"

Louie snorted. "I didn't waste my breath. It'd be my word against yours; and even if they believed me, there's no law against a man walking around his own house."

"But awkward if dear Shelley should hear of it," and Harris; "which brings us to your proposition."

"Just get her to drop the charges and I won't breathe a word."

"Oh, I think we can finesse her together," Harris said easily; and when Louie looked blank, he complained, "I do wish you knew bridge terminology. As you've guessed, Shelley and I are indeed playing a rather deadly game. You, Mr. — ah, Louie, shall be my trump card."

"You want *me* to kill her?" Louie squeaked. "No dice!"

"Dice are for fools who depend on luck and happenstance!" snapped Harris. "We shall play with skill and certainty. The police will have no reason to suspect a petty thief of murder, and I shall take care to be surrounded by witnesses at the time. In return, I'll see that this charge against you is dropped and give you enough money to abandon your nocturnal activities for quite some time."

"I think his activities should be stopped right now!" Standing in the half-opened doorway with a loosely-strung bow in her left

hand, Shelley Harris looked like a young Diana, sun-bronzed and invincible.

Without moving, she smiled wickedly at her husband. "How's this for a game plan, darling? I'm quietly checking over my bows for next week's tourney when suddenly a shot rings out in your study. Alarmed, I fit an arrow into the string and rush to your aid. Imagine my horror when I find that you've tried to fend off this insanely persistent intruder with your pistol and have been mortally wounded in the struggle. At the loss of my beloved husband, I'm angered beyond madness. I take aim at the fleeing culprit — *stay right where you are!*" she warned sharply as Louie edged for the door "— and before I realize what I've done, I've pierced his heart with my grief-strung arrow. Like it?"

"It has a certain panache," Harris admitted. "But as usual, my dear, you've forgotten to draw all the trumps." His hand groped inside the table drawer which he'd eased open and came out empty.

"Is this what you're looking for?" she asked sweetly. She pushed the door fully open and a gun's dull metal glinted in her right hand. "I've always known precisely how many arrows were in your quiver, darling. In case you were tempted to use this on me, I planned to make a few adjustments. The next time you pulled the trigger, it would

have exploded in your face."

She came closer, pointing the gun at his chest. "I do wish I could say it's been fun, Winston."

"Hold it right there!" thundered Sergeant Dixon. The study was suddenly full of policemen, who quickly confiscated the girl's gun and bow. Louie's legs had turned to rubber and he sank down on the nearest chair. "I thought you were going to let her do it," he grumbled.

Dixon flashed him a wide smile and turned to the Harrises. "You're both under arrest," he said and began to read them their rights.

"On what charge?" Harris said haughtily.

"You, for conspiracy to commit murder; you wife for attempted murder."

"Nonsense!" Harris cried, placing a husbandly arm around his wife. She glared at him and tried to resist, but he held her implacably until she regained her composure and relaxed against his shoulder. "Surely you don't believe that little charade you just saw was for real? It was a Mississippi Heart Hand. Shelley and I were simply having a bit of sport with this fellow. Tell him, darling."

"That's all, Sergeant." The girl's green eyes were guileless and innocent. "Winston saw me crack the door right after he let that man in. He gave me our special wink which meant to play

along with his joke."

"You may be the bridge expert," said Dixon, "But I've played enough poker to recognize a bluff when I see it, and you're both lying. When Louie told me it was you sneaking around here last night, Harris, I thought he was trying to wiggle out of trouble; but when he told me what your wife said when she shot him, and I began wondering about your brake failure. I pulled some well-placed strings today, and it's very odd: none of your friends can understand why you've stuck it out this long, but nobody's taking bets on you two ever celebrating a silver anniversary together. There was even some talk about two moderate, private incomes which could become one very comfortable fortune if either of you died.

"It was obvious from the moment Louie put the idea in my head — young wife, older husband. One athletic, the other intellectual. Even this house: modern design, antique furniture. I wonder how long you've been playing Russian roulette with each other?"

Winston Harris smiled coolly. "An interesting hypothesis, but one you'd have difficulty presenting to a judge if neither of us cooperates."

Dixon stared at them a long frustrated moment, then ordered his man back to town.

"What about me?" asked

Louie, who'd been ignored till then.

"You're home free this time," Dixon said grimly. "They're not going to risk having you talk in court."

"Oh, I think he's learned his lesson," Shelley Harris said lightly; her glance touching the newly-mended sleeve of Louie's jacket.

"But the games stop here and now," Dixon warned. "If anything ever happens to either of you, the other had better have the mayor himself as an alibi, because I'll be there, taking your story apart bit by bit. No more free accidents or mistaken identity!" He glared at them again and then turned on his heel. "Come on, Louie."

Driving down the steep hill, Dixon was silent; but as they swerved toward town and Louie complained about his arm, he chuckled sourly, "Count yourself lucky that a flesh wound's all you got for getting between those two and almost breaking the eleventh commandment."

"Eleventh?" Louie surreptitiously patted his pocket wherein lay the spade-shaped paperweight he'd taken when no one was looking. From tip to base, it was only six inches long, but from its heft, pure sterling silver.

"Yeah," said Dixon. "What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder." She almost undered you!"

It was a typical cop joke, and Louie didn't bother to laugh.

Continued from page 112

*and violence in the next one. He assures me taste and wit are out. Can't decide if I need a new libido or a new agent.*

*Does all this sound dreadfully familiar? I can't think of a single fascinating detail unless you can make something out of the fact that I'm currently caught up in the courtship and mating rituals of the black and yellow argiope (commonly known as a "writing" spider — and isn't that appropriate for a mystery writer?) Most books say the female argiope "does not necessarily eat her mate." But in the half-dozen matings I've observed, she closes in on him and starts munching the instant he's completed fertilization. (In case you have a mental image of mammalian-stype copulation, let me say that the male argiope is 1/5 the size of the female. He deposits his sperm on his own little web, sucks it up in his pedipalps, and then goes looking for a female. When he finds her, he inserts the sperm into an opening on her underside just below her "waist" — rather like slipping a letter into a mailbox.)*

Continued to page 135

# One Plus One Is What?

by JOHN M. HEBERT

Sometimes things never add up the way you expect them to.  
Sometimes it's more logical if they don't!

THINGS WERE PRETTY QUIET in Detective Division at nine o'clock on Tuesday evening. Sergeant Bill Evans stopped typing a follow-up report, lit a cigarette, and put his feet up on the desk. His brown eyes looked at the seasick-green walls, and he wondered why the city had bought so much of that color. Maybe, he thought, the new building will have at least a different shade of green. For one thing, it clashed with his green plaid sports jacket.

The phone rang. Bill sighed, took his feet off the desk and picked up a well-chewed pencil. He answered on the second ring. "Detectives, Evans."

"Bill, this is Jack Piper. We've

got a hit and run at Second and Broadway that looks a little funny. Besides, it's a fatality." Piper was the patrol supervisor for the three-to-eleven shift.

"Okay, I'll be down in a minute." Bill ran a hand through his graying brown hair, shrugged into his blue overcoat and walked up one flight to the "barn" to check out one of the detective cars.

The snow was still falling when he got to the corner of Second and Broadway. As he brought the car to a slow, sliding stop, Bill noticed a prone body and a cardboard box in the street in front of Parker's Mens Store. Two squad cars, lights flashing, formed a protective barrier around the scene at

the curb. Bill walked to the closest car and got in. "What've you got, Tim?"

"Victim's dead. The kid in Jim's car says it looked deliberate," Corporal Timmons answered, nodding toward the other squad car.

"Okay, I'll check." Bill got out and walked over to the other car and got in the front. A boy somewhere in his teens was sitting in the back nervously smoking a cigarette. Jim Aarons was smoking a pipe while he filled out an accident report. "What's the deal, Jim?" Bill asked, pushing Aaron's briefcase to the middle of the seat.

"Billy here says the car that struck the victim was parked in the alley. When the victim started to cross the street in the middle of the block, the car took off, headed straight for him, hit him, and kept going east on Broadway. He says it was a light-colored car, but doesn't know the make. Probably late-model."

"Well, son," Bill said, turning in the seat to look through the wire grill, "is that the way it happened?"

"Yes, sir. Except, well, the man said something when I got to him."

"What man — the victim?"

"Yes, sir. I was going to try to help him. I've had some first-aid training. He was bleeding a lot from the nose and ears. I didn't move him, but leaned down to see

if he was breathing. He looked at me and said, 'Twenty-three.'"

"Twenty-three? Twenty-three what?"

"I don't know. That's all he said." The boy looked uncomfortable, as if he feared the police wouldn't believe him.

"Okay, son," Bill said gently, "If that's what you heard, that's all you can tell us."

He took out his notebook, opened it to a fresh numbered page and wrote down Billy Schultz's full name, address, date of birth and phone number. Billy left, knowing the book store at Third and Broadway was closed by now.

Bill and Jim got out of the squad car and walked over to the body. The dead man was sprawled on his back, one leg tucked at an angle under the other. His right arm was pointing toward the alley entrance, the left by his side. The blood had stopped flowing and was mixed with the snow under his head. He was wearing a dark-brown, three-piece suit and a light brown overcoat. No hat. The driver's license in his wallet identified him as P. Justin Arthur, 715 East Avenue D.

"Anybody call his house?" Bill asked, straightening up. Aarons shook his head. "The coroner notified?" Aarons nodded. "Somebody had better notify the next of kin," Bill continued.

Aarons turned and spoke briefly to Timmons, who had gotten out of

his car and was shining his flashlight on the body despite the bright streetlights. Habit, Bill thought. Timmons got back into the car and began talking into the microphone. A few minutes later he shouted that the wife had been notified.

Aarons turned to Bill and said, "Tim put the cardboard box over some tire tracks. Wanna take a look?"

They looked. Bill felt a warm spot in his heart for Timmons as he saw clear, distinct tracks in the packed snow. The new snow would have obliterated them by now, as proven by the half inch of it on top of the box. Bill put the box back carefully and hopped into the front seat of Timmons' car. He gleefully shook hands with a mystified Timmons and grabbed the microphone. "Headquarters, five-oh-two."

"Five-oh-two, headquarters."

"Would you ask Lieutenant Whitney to come to Second and Broadway with the lacquer and plaster?"

"Ten-four."

Ten minutes later Lieutenant Whitney had arrived. Twenty minutes after that the tracks had been sprayed with lacquer to keep the plaster from distorting them or melting the snow. The plaster was gradually hardening and would be ready to lift in another half hour. Evans and Whitney prowled the area but couldn't find anything else that tied in with the

incident. Bill told the lieutenant about the dead man's last words:

"Could it be a license number, or part of one?" Bill asked.

"Could be. It's worth a try," Whitney mused. "We don't have a hell of a lot to go on. How come that kid didn't know what make/model the car was? I thought most teenagers would know that."

"Apparently he's not that interested in cars. Hasn't got one of his own. He doesn't see too well without his glasses anyway. He had 'em off so the snow wouldn't get on 'em."

"I'll TWX the Russians tonight," Whitney said. The "Russians" was the Motor Vehicle Division, or MVD. Back in the days when the Soviet secret police was known by the same initials, some wag had started calling them that and it stuck. Compared to the names some people called them when their driver's license was revoked, "Russians" was almost a term of endearment.

AT NINE O'CLOCK the next morning Bill went to talk with Mrs. Arthur. The house was nice, even though it was in an older part of town. Two stories, maybe forty years old, with plenty of trees. Bill sighed; he lived in a new section where the trees were about ten feet tall and two inches in diameter.

Mrs. Arthur was about as old as the house, Bill estimated when she answered the door. Dark-brown



hair, brown eyes, about 5'4" tall, wearing a green dress that showed off her trim figure. Not really the classic picture of a grieving widow. "Mrs. Arthur, I'm Sergeant Evans," Bill said, showing his badge. "I know this may be difficult for you, but I do have to ask you some questions."

"I understand. Please come in." She had a melodic voice, not at all as he'd expected. There was no trace of grief.

They walked through the small foyer into the living room. It was furnished almost entirely in green, one shade or another. Bill noted with relief that none of the shades matched his office. A long green couch faced the front door, two green overstuffed chairs flanked the fireplace on the left wall, and a light green rug under all of it. There were a lot of plants hanging from the ceiling or sitting in pots on various endtables or stands. Bill liked plants but thought this was going too far. He sat down on the couch. Mrs. Arthur sat in the chair nearest him and looked at him expectantly.

"What can I do for you, Sergeant Evans?"

"Ma'am, like I said, this may be difficult ..."

"Let's get something clear right away, Sergeant," she interrupted, "Justin and I weren't getting along very well. In fact, I was seriously considering divorce. So, even though I'm sorry he's dead, I'm not going to spend

a lot of time grieving."

"All right, fair enough," Bill replied. Any shock he might have had about her attitude had disappeared after his first six years on the department. Now, after a total of fourteen years, it took a lot to shock him. "Mrs. Arthur, we have reason to believe your husband's death wasn't an accident."

"Oh?" Her eyebrows flickered.

"Yes. Apparently the driver of the car that hit him was waiting for your husband, and, according to the witness we have, deliberately ran him down."

Bill watched her reactions carefully, especially when he mentioned the witness. It might have been her in the car.

She smiled slightly, then lit a cigarette. "Are you suggesting that I'm a suspect?"

"At this moment I don't know, Mrs. Arthur. *Should* you be?"

"No. I won't deny that I didn't particularly care for Justin, but I didn't dislike him enough to kill him." She crossed her legs and Bill saw a flash of white thigh. Her brown eyes met his for an instant as she continued. "If it means anything, I was home all night with a friend — up until the police called me."

Who is the friend?"

"Susan Scott. She lives next door."

"All right. Would you mind if I looked at your car?"

"Not at all."

She led him through the kitchen and out a side door into the attached garage. There was a green Chevy Nova parked on one side, license 209-469. It didn't have any marks on it, and from what Bill could see of the tires there was no match with the casting they'd taken the night before. They went back to the living room. Bill remained standing.

"Can you think of anyone who might want to kill your husband?"

"I can think of a dozen," she answered grimly. "Justin wasn't a well-liked man. In fact, he was a stinker. The only reason the college kept him on was because he was so careful not to violate any of their rules. And he is — was — a good instructor." She sat down again and crossed her legs.

"A dozen people, more or less, might have wanted to kill your husband?" Bill said as he sat down also. "Why? The world is full of stinkers, but few of them get murdered." *Unfortunately*, Bill thought to himself, having had his share of stinkers messing up his past life.

"Justin was a turd, Sergeant Evans. He treated people like dirt, me included. To him, people were playthings, created only for what he could get from them. I didn't realize that about him until after we were married. He also cheated on me. Constantly. I have a feeling he started the week after our wedding, fifteen years ago. It was bad enough he was cheating on

me, but he went after other men's wives too, with a fair amount of success. He was, after all, a handsome man. And charming when he wanted to be."

"Can you give me any names?" Bill asked.

She gave him nine she was sure of — the husbands' names. She then gave him six more women's names but couldn't remember the last names.

"All these in the last two years?" Bill asked, incredulous. The man must have been a smooth operator. Considering that most married women wouldn't even go out to dinner with another man, Justin Arthur must have had several "in the mill" at all times. "Is there any other reason someone might want to kill him?" As if nine-plus jealous husbands weren't enough!

"He was on a jury three years ago. Foreman. The man was found guilty and swore he'd take revenge on the jury, especially Justin."

Bingo? Bill made another entry in his notebook. "Do you remember the defendant's name?"

"Muller. John Muller. He was accused of aggravated assault. A gun, I think. Anyway, it was back in '75. October? No, November, because Justin was still on jury duty on my birthday."

"Is he out of prison, do you know?"

"I haven't the foggiest idea." She crossed those damnably long

legs again. "I don't even know what sentence he got."

"Anything else you can think of?" She shook her head. Bill stood up and buttoned his overcoat. "Thank you, Mrs. Arthur. If you do think of anything else, please call me. My number's on the card."

"Of course. Call anytime, Sergeant." Her eyelids flickered again.

Bill talked briefly with Susan Scott, the neighbor who had been with Mrs. Arthur the night before. She said the two women had gotten together for some gin rummy and television just after eight o'clock and had been together until, and after, the station called. She denied that Mrs. Arthur had been absent any longer than necessary to answer a nature call. She confirmed that Justin Arthur was a stinker, but that was to be expected since she was a close friend of Mrs. Arthur's.

WHEN BILL GOT BACK to the office, Oscar Whitney was having his eighth cup of coffee, judging by the level in the coffeemaker. Bill hung his overcoat in the corner and sat down at his desk.

"Well, - Sherlock," Whitney asked, "are you ready to reveal the name of the killer?" As usual, he was surrounded with a fog of cigarette smoke.

"Yeah, if you want to rent the Civic Center to hold all the sus-

pects," Bill answered wearily. "The man apparently had more enemies than Adolf Hitler. You get anything on the license number?"

"You got a box? Just the ones that *start* with the twenty-three take up four pages on the print-out." Whitney handed the large paper sheets over to Bill and lit another cigarette.

Bill lit a cigarette of his own, in self-defense if nothing else, and started looking through the listing. As usual, he started talking to himself. Oscar Whitney had long ago stopped trying to break Bill of the habit; he turned up the radio monitor on his desk and started fiddling with one of the mug-books.

Bill scanned the listing rapidly, automatically eliminating the truck licenses that began with twenty three. Even with his glasses off, Billy Schultz could tell the difference. "Hmm," Bill muttered to himself, "Tan Chevy" — tick mark. "White ford" — tick mark. "Red Chevy?" — tick mark with a question mark. "Crud. There've got to be two hundred of the damn — Hi, there!"

Oscar Whitney looked up from the mug-book. Bill was circling an entire line on the printout. "Something?" Whitney asked.

"Could be," Bill answered excitedly, "One of the names the widow gave me just popped up here. John Muller, with a white

Buick, late model. Mrs. Arthur said her husband was foreman of a jury that convicted a John Muller three years ago, and Muller threatened to get him."

"Hell, most of 'em do. What was he up for?"

"Aggravated, she said. With a gun." Bill picked up the phone and dialed Records. "Fran? Bill Evans. What have you got on a John Muller? Yes, yes, I know I gotta come up and fill out a Privacy Act form. All I wanta know is if you've got anything up there so the trip isn't wasted. Okay." He cocked the receiver to one side and spoke to Whitney. "Bureaucrats. Gotta fill out a form when you ask about somebody. No wonder the so-called wheels of justice grind so slowly. Yes, Fran. You do? Okay, thanks. I'll be right up."

Bill took the stairs to Records two at a time. After impatiently filling out the required forms he finally got his hands on Muller's folder. John Francis Muller. White male, DOB: October 9, 1951, five-feet-eleven, 170, brown and blue. Last known address: 918 N. Eighteenth, Apartment 6. Muller's criminal record was encouraging. At least for the present case.

*June 69 — Assault. 10 days county jail. Five suspended.*

*October 70 — Open container in motor vehicle. Resisted arrest. 10 days county jail. \$50 fine. 6 days suspended.*

*January 72 — Driving under suspension. Fleeing police officer. \$150 fine. Five days in county jail.*

*October 72 — Driving while intoxicated. Fleeing police officer. Resisting arrest. \$300 fine. Fifteen days county jail.*

*September 75 — Aggravated assault with firearm. Four years in-state penitentiary. Paroled October 16th, 1978. Parole officer: Walter Johnson.*

Walter Johnson wasn't in his office. Bill left a message asking him to call, then drove to the junior college at the northwestern corner of the city. After asking directions from two bundled-up students he found the Dean's office.

Dean John Smith looked like a character left over from a Dickens novel, but his language was modern. "Justin Arthur was an outstanding instructor, but in his personal life he was a complete SOB. Everyone on campus knew he was a womanizer, including the students. Some of his students were also some of his victims, if you want to call them that."

"What did he teach, Dean Smith?" Bill asked.

"Call me John. It's bad enough having a name that motel clerks raise their eyebrows and snicker at. Dean is my position, not my name."

"Okay," Bill chuckled.

"Justin taught computer

science, everything from hardware — the equipment itself — to software, the system design and programming. He also taught the basic theory and mathematics of electronic data processing. And, like I said before, he was outstanding. During school hours, he was totally immersed in all aspects of data processing. He almost talked in computer language. He kept the classes small, and almost guaranteed each student a job on completion. But," Smith straightened up in his padded chair, "he had the morals of a goat, the manners of a Hun, and the basic attitude of a shark."

"Why did you keep him on, then?"

"Because he was good, and we're limited to his official life, not his private one. He had 'rights,' you know," Smith continued bitterly. "I'm sure you run across that often in your profession."

Bill nodded and sighed. He was well aware of people's rights. On the other hand, police officers didn't have the right to keep their private lives separate. "I have to ask this. Do you know of anyone who might want to kill him?"

"Crap, half the faculty and probably a third of the students hated his guts. If I were you, I'd concentrate on irate husbands or fathers."

"How about you? Did you have a reason?"

Bill expected a heated denial.

Instead, Smith laughed easily.

"If despising somebody is a reason, hell yes. I won't claim to be sorry he's dead. We're better off and so is his wife. But me? Nah. I didn't like the bastard well enough to kill him."

Bill laughed, shook hands, and left. He decided not to talk with any of the other faculty at this time, feeling he'd hear the same thing from everyone. Smith had apparently said it all, for all of them.

WALTER JOHNSON, the parole officer, was waiting for Bill when he got back to the office. Johnson was tall, dark and worried. He refused the offered coffee. "Bill, got an idea you wanta talk to one of my guys."

"You got it, but how did you know?"

"Easy. Muller called me this morning after you did, worried as hell."

"He might have good reason to be. What did he say?"

"His paranoia level is about nine-point-seven. He hasn't been outta the joint very long, and who gets wasted but a guy he threatened. Anyway, he'd like to talk to you."

"He's willing to turn himself in?" Bill asked. This was almost too good to be true.

"Not turn himself in. He'd just like to see how serious you are about him." It was too good to be true.

"Damn serious. He's got a

light-colored, late model car, the license plate begins with twenty-three, the victim said 'twenty-three' before he died, Muller threatened the victim after his trial in '75, and he's got a history of violence."

Johnson stared at Bill. "Christ," he said dully. "That doesn't look very good."

Bill snorted.

"Listen, Bill, for some reason I believe 'im. He's a wiseass, but he looks like he's straightened out and grown up. My caseload isn't too heavy right now, so I've been able to keep pretty good track of him." Johnson's eyes were sorrowful and his voice was barely loud enough to hear.

"Walt, what do you expect me to do? I was going to request a warrant to look at his car. He looks good, damn good."

"I know, I know. But I believe him anyway. He said he didn't have a thing to do with it."

"Well, is he willing to have us look over his car?"

"Lemme check." Johnson made a phone call, talked to Muller for a few minutes, then hung up. "He said to come over. The car's parked in front of the Sweet-heart Bakery."

Bill took another detective along in case Muller decided to play games. The bakery was only about a five-minute drive, and Muller was waiting in the parking lot.

Johnson made the introductions. "John, this is Sergeant Evans. He'd like to look over your car, like I said on the phone." Neither Muller nor Bill Evans offered to shake hands.

"Mr. Muller, at this moment, you are not under arrest, and have the right to refuse us access to your car without a search warrant," Bill said formally. *Don't want to blow this on a technicality*, he thought to himself.

Muller fit the description on the rap sheet even though he'd grown a mustache. Although he was uneasy, he looked ready to do anything to clear himself. "Go ahead, Sergeant," he said hesitantly, "Check out my car. I haven't got anything to hide."

The first thing Bill noticed was a new scratch on the left edge of the front bumper. There were also a couple of dark brown spots on the left front fender and on the grill that could have been blood. Bill instructed the other detective to take pictures and collect samples. Both Muller and Johnson were staring in horror at the car, and for a second Bill had a flash of doubt about Muller's possible guilt.

"Sergeant, wait a minute," Muller said desperately, "I was working on the car the other day and might have put that scratch on the bumper. And I cut my hand on the grill trying to run the new block-heater cord through it."

"You waited until January to

put in a block heater?" Bill asked, reaching for his Miranda card.

"The old one burned out. My wife plugged it into a 220 outlet."

"Oh, shit" he continued when he saw the Miranda card. His shoulders slumped and he almost fell. Johnson reached out and took Muller by the left elbow, steadying him.

"Mr. Muller, I'm placing you under arrest for murder. You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will ..." Muller put his hands in front of his face and dropped his head. He didn't say a word as Bill handcuffed him and led him to the car.

"All right, John," Bill said after the booking ritual, "Do you want a lawyer?"

Muller looked at Johnson, who shrugged. "You're damn right I want a lawyer. You're not hangin' this one on me!" His face flushed and hands were shaking so badly he could hardly hold the cigarette Bill had given him.

"Your right," Bill replied patiently. "Do you have anyone in particular in mind?" Muller shook his head. Bill handed him a phone book and let Muller and Johnson look in the yellow pages.

Bill left them in the care of Oscar Whitney and called the crime lab. Contrary to fictional crime lab personnel, Robert Brekke had all the personality of a fish.

"Lab. Brekke speaking." *Fish voice*, Bill thought.

"This is Evans. You got any idea of when you'll have that blood sample that Howe brought in typed?"

"I'll call you about four, Sergeant."

"Okay, thanks. Did Howe tell you what it's for?"

"A homicide investigation, correct?" My God, Bill thought. A little inflection.

"Correct. I'll expect your call. Bye."

Muller had been escorted across the courthouse lawn to the county jail when Bill walked back into his office. Johnson was still there, though, and he looked angry. "What is this shit, Bill?" he stormed. "You didn't have to bust him today, did you? You could've waited until the lab report."

"What, with a guy who's got a history of splitting? No way. When he's in the 'Henderson Hilton' I don't have to worry about where he is."

"I don't think he'd split! Hell, Bill, you oughta know me well enough. I wouldn't back him up if I thought he was guilty."

"All right, all right," Bill replied impatiently. "I trust you, but not him. I did what I thought was necessary."

"I suppose," Johnson said shortly, then stalked out.

At four-ten, Bill was still going over the list of nine names Mrs. Arthus had given him, comparing them with another vehicle list the Russians had provided. Only three



of them really matched the late model, light color requirement: Terrence Williams, Robert Klein and Gerald Thompson. He checked the nine wives' cars also, by name, but didn't come up with any additional matches.

Williams' plate number was 10-111, Klein's 263-402 and Thompson's 552-065. Not a twenty-three in a basketful. And yet ... The phone rang, disturbing the tiny bell ringing in Bill's mind. "Detectives, Evans."

"This is Brekke. The blood is Type O. I couldn't determine the RH factor. The mark on the bumper was probably made with some sort of tool, perhaps a screw-driver."

"Could it be made with wire-rimmed glasses or a belt buckle?" Bill asked, feeling his stomach starting to knot.

"Absolutely not. The scratch is too deep to indicate anything other than a sharp-edged, hard object like a tool."

"All right then. Thanks for being so fast," Bill said calmly. "Shit!" Howe looked up questioningly. "I've got a feeling our case just went out the window. Brekke said the mark on the bumper was probably made by a tool and the blood type is O. What the hell is Arthur's blood type?"

"Let's see," Howe said, picking up the coroner's initial report. "Type A," he continued ruefully. "The Lieutenant isn't gonna like this."

Howe was right. The Lieutenant, like Queen Victoria, was not amused. He agreed that Bill could have waited until the blood was typed. He didn't raise his voice, but still made Bill feel like a shoplifter with \$2.73 in merchandise in his pocket and \$43 in his wallet.

It was after five when the breast beating was finished. Bill walked glumly over to the jail and arranged for Muller's release. He'd forgotten his overshoes, so ended up with wet feet. Muller was too happy, at least at the moment, to mention false-arrest suits. To top things off, a rookie patrolman almost ran Bill over in the "barn."

BILL SPENT THE NEXT DAY talking with the three men on Mrs. Arthur's list whose cars had the "right type" of color. Not one of them had a good alibi for the night of the killing. Williams, in addition to being a building contractor, was a state legislator, and tried to pull rank on Bill. He was politely informed of where he could place the rank. Klein was half "in the bag" by one P.M. and started on a long dissertation, punctuated with tears, about his unfaithful wife. Thompson was cooperative but vague about where he'd been Tuesday night. Bill checked in at the office, found nothing new, so went home.

Sylvia wasn't home from work yet, so Bill walked to the day-care